

AGENDA
Task Force on Study Special Education Services and Funding
May 9, 2023

In attendance

1. Adler, Jason – AFT – attended via Zoom
2. Bhatt, Nachi - DCF Education Consultant Representing Children in Foster Care - filling in for Susan Yankee – attended via Zoom
3. Bowman, Alicia (CAS)
4. Ditrio, Anthony – CT CASA – attended via Zoom
5. Feinstein, Andrew - Special Ed Lawyer - Co-Chair
6. Flaherty, Tara – Parent Representative
7. Flippone, Rosalie (Education Clerk)
8. Gibson, Patrick – State Finance Project- filling in for Lisa Hammersley
9. Gilberti, Samuel (Legislative Aide)
10. Grove, Mike - CASBO
11. Helene, Karen (CAPSF)
12. Klimkiewicz, Bryan - CSDE
13. Lussier, Jennifer – CPAC
14. McCarthy, Patrice - CABA
15. Protulis, Eric – EASTCONN filling in for Heather Tartaglia
16. Rabinowitz, Frances - Executive Director CAPSS – Co-Chair
17. Turner, Amy – ConnCASE filling in for Kathie Gabrielson
18. Wanzer, Stephanie – CEA filling in for Kate Dias

- I. Introductions (5 minutes)
 - a. Introductions occurred for committee members and those filling in for the day.
 - b. The end goal of the committee is to make significant but realistic recommendations to the legislature based on what we see. Please be candid and open, and let us know your thoughts.

- II. Report on Prevalence Rates and required data collection for OSEP from Bryan Klimkiewicz, CSDE (15 minutes)
 - a. [Special Education in CT PowerPoint](#) presented by Bryan Klimkiewicz of CSDE
 - i. SRBI guidelines came out in 2008.
 - ii. Prevalence rates are calculated as a K-12 percentage because CT does not have universal PreK.
 - iii. Two numbers influence prevalence rate
 1. The increasing identification of students with disabilities and,
 2. The decreasing total of K-12 enrollment in Connecticut
 - iv. Special education student counts are increasing at approximately 2.5% per year, while the total enrollment drops at about 0.5% per year.
 - b. Increase started around 2012-2013 SY.

- c. When looking at prevalence numbers, we look at K-12. Federal rule change to include 5-year-olds – we don't compare the numbers before that rule change in 2021.
- d. Fran – leveling out when SRBI came in – wondering what your thoughts are. Handed out [prevalence rates by districts](#).
 - i. In 2010-2011, we had 63,486 students. Now in 2022-2023, we have 82,680 students.
 - 1. The prevalence rate by district is relevant data.
 - 2. Superintendents express that their early childhood referrals from 0-3 have increased dramatically.
 - 3. What are your thoughts on this?
 - 4. What happens from the CSDE if those numbers are high or low?
 - ii. Conversation took place over the impact of Covid, the use of technology, and our children's needs.
 - 1. We need to change how we approach children ages 3-8 because these children have had limited access to social situations over the past several years.
 - 2. It is very hard to determine what is lack of exposure and what is a disability.
 - 3. Regarding typical peers, there isn't a good social role model. It seems like whole classes need support.
 - 4. It is difficult to determine the impact of social isolation and the student's inability to socialize.
 - iii. We have the same impact on middle and high school students.
 - iv. There has been an impact on behavior, social skills, and language because there was a disruption.
 - v. Covid does not just cause this. Our children are changing. Their needs are changing.
 - vi. CSDE - There isn't an over-identification – we do a very good job with our indicator 9 and 10, which is disproportionate representations based on race or ethnicity, or at least the overall prevalence versus a breakdown in each prevalence category.
 - vii. The question brought up about differentiating other contributing factors versus disability is really where more support is needed and where the CSDE feels they can provide some additional support.
 - viii. Fran – Does that mean we should identify more kids for special education, or should we change our tier 1 instruction?
 - ix. We should also speak about the age that our kids start Kindergarten. Our kindergarten starts at age five by December 31st, while other places are by September 1st. Our Kindergarteners are young. Not every 5-year-old is ready.
 - x. Prevalence by disability (category over the years)
 - 1. Currently, autism and other health impairments (OHI) have had the largest changes.
 - 2. Learning disability has been on a steady rise and increased year after year.

- xi. Professor Jonathan Haidt at (NYU) has suggested that the massive increase, particularly in teenage anxiety and depression, is due to the universality of the iPhone. Sharp data shows Other Health Impairment (OHI) numbers jumping in the 12, 13, and 14-year age groups.
- xii. Fran - Wondering if the Learning Disability (LD) is often because of reading difficulties?
- xiii. Are we teaching reading correctly in the earlier grades?
- xiv. SRBI should have the biggest impact on Learning Disability numbers.
- xv. OHI would be substantially higher, and therefore the special education prevalence would be higher if not for the substantially increased use of 504s.
- xvi. Over the years, we've collectively forgotten what specifically designed instruction to meet the needs of students is.
- xvii. Rate of Change by Disability
 1. Learning Disability Change from 2008 – 2023 – 42.0%
 2. Learning Disability Change (10 Year) – 39.6%
 3. Autism Change from 2008 – 2023 is 151.3%
 4. Autism Change (10 Year) – 62.5%
 5. Speech and Language are decreasing.
- xviii. We have become more sophisticated in identifying learning disabilities because we track progress over a longer period versus single assessments. There is more opportunity to look at the tier one structure that would reinforce that, particularly with some disabilities that are more prevalent and can be supported in a classroom with the right instruction.
- xix. Andrew: How many kids are exited from special education? We tend to see that once a student is identified, they tend to keep that identification through graduation.
- xx. Some transitions make exiting happen – students moving from one building to another, new teams, and different academic expectations for students.
- xxi. We can provide additional support for this area when a 3-year re-evaluation occurs. What are the criteria for that student to return to the general education setting?
- xxii. Special Education rates are indicative of general ed.
- xxiii. The discussion so far about how we must look at our kids differently, education differently, tier 1 instruction, the number of kids in classrooms, how we teach reading, etc., all need to factor into our recommendation.
- xxiv. If we feel there is a strong correlation between these issues, we need to say this.
- xxv. SRBI in some districts has fallen off the radar.
- xxvi. The CSDE should offer more SRBI, MTSS, or RTI training, and more emphasis should be given to having it in the districts.
- xxvii. Every teacher should be better trained in reading. Special education teachers should be required to have more reading courses.

xxviii. We need SRBI and Tier 1 training and support for teachers because this is one of the things that fast-tracks kids into special education because no one in the building is trained to support them.

III. Report on Survey of Staff Shortages from Fran Rabinowitz, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents. (15 minutes)

a. [SPED Survey – completed by CAPSS in April](#)

- i. Current Openings – 167 member districts – received 92 responses (only included half of the student population)
 1. SPED Teacher – 222.5
 2. SPED Paraprofessionals – 680
 3. School Psychologists – 51.4
 4. School Counselors – 21
 5. Social Workers – 39.5
 6. Speech Pathologists – 32
- ii. Biggest factors –
 1. What are the costs of these shortages?
 - a. From Special Education Teachers, we hear:
 - i. Respect
 - ii. Low Pay
 - iii. Danger
 - iv. Paperwork
 2. You have an increasing number of students eligible and a decreasing number of teachers available in the profession.
 3. That means that the special education teachers currently there have a much higher caseload.
 4. Special education teachers no longer feel effective.
 5. Teachers, in general, are overwhelmed. Student behavior is more difficult.
 - iii. Special educators get paid the same as other teachers.
 - iv. Teacher’s jobs are tough – they are leaving the profession – Is there a “hazard pay”? Special Education teachers’ jobs are harder dealing with things they can’t control.
 - v. Benhaven - 7 out of 10 teachers are homegrown.
 - vi. Waterbury has taken their paraprofessionals and fast-tracked them to special education teachers.
 - vii. RESCS – you are getting the students that the schools can’t handle.
 - viii. Having difficulty getting people into teacher residency programs because they don’t have a degree, such as paraprofessionals – most don’t have a bachelors.
 - ix. State and Federal Governments have different calendars. Maybe we could get them on the same schedule, giving people more time to get things done.
 - x. Teachers are getting recruited out and getting higher steps in other districts – the downside is that our current teachers are seeing this, which isn’t right. Some districts are giving school psychologists doctorate pay.

- xi. Not enough Special Education teachers are coming out of our colleges.
- xii. You will not see an increase in staff compared to the increase in special education students.
- xiii. How do you increase the pipeline?
- xiv. Growth from within – that is where you will get the increase in staff.
- xv. Is there an argument creating an intermediate higher level due to the paperwork?
- xvi. Two bills designed to retain teachers – 1) pandemic retirement benefits and 2) tax offset are both dead – a) awful for teachers, b) if they aren't going to do it for everyone, how about for needy districts or positions?
- xvii. Expanding the dates due to summer, not during the traditional school year – you will need staff to do that. Maybe just match to the federal standards. Eligibility timeline requirements – 45 days from parents signing the referral to implementation of the IEP – Federal timeline requirements are 60 calendar days.
- xviii. Underlying point – School Psychologists spend all of their time testing and none of their time counseling kids.
- xix. In the pandemic, we all experienced difficulties in evaluating students. The CSDE partnered with the RESC Alliance to provide free school evaluations. There were some parameters around that. They were not for initial eligibility determinations. This was for students who were already identified and who were having re-evaluations. Then there were some additional parameters around the complexity of the students. The RESC Alliance was able to build a bench of evaluators. Each region would have an evaluation team. The RESCs are experiencing the same staff shortages that everyone else is. We broke it out into three sections of the year (cohorts). The three areas most often asked for were cognitive testing, special education, and speech & language. There were approximately 550 evaluations provided by the RESC Alliance on behalf of the districts. In some cases, the district could ask evaluators to attend PPT meetings and deliver those reports, but in others, they accepted the evaluations.
- xx. It does take a tremendous amount of logistic coordination with access to records and access to students etc.
- xxi. Third year of pilot working with the RESCs.
- xxii. A question was raised about the feasibility of substantially expanding this program. The challenge is staffing. They chose to disperse them more broadly by use of a survey. It is costly. Some complexities – this is not an independent evaluation but an extension of the district.
- xxiii. Over the next month, let's think about the staff shortages (short and long-term planning)
- xxiv. A bill at the Legislature will establish a certification task force. We can streamline certification and maintain high standards.
- xxv. There is a couple of different cross-certification versions of these programs.
- xxvi. Nachi – Discussed a few research-based documents about the prestige of education, especially in special education.

1. [Economic Policy Institute paper](#) states that the teacher pay gap (pay penalty) for being a teacher as opposed to another professional commensurate level of professional is a 17% to 20% pay gap in those similarly situated professionals, meaning gone through a similar amount of schooling to do the work.
 2. [Working paper out of Brown](#) that came out in 2022 – talks about teacher prestige has decreased dramatically over the last 50 years. There are several reasons for that, and one thing that long term we could do as a State, if we chose to, is go back to 1986, when we enhanced education. That was the last time the State enhanced education fiscally.
 3. [1986 Education Enhancement Act](#)
- xxvii. Can we collectively think through practices that are working? Who can we turn to study, pilot, or build from? What are the best practices in dealing with teacher retention? What are recruitment and training practices that are working? How do we move paraprofessionals to teachers?

IV. Reports from Task Forces (15 minutes)

A. Eligibility

- 1) Met and developed some specific questions to guide their work and focus on what is needed.
- 2) Vague understanding when making these decisions of preliminary eligibility from the State.
- 3) Reference to classification –
- 4) An issue exists when students are out of the age at the age of 5 or 6. Are we under-identifying because of the age requirement?
- 5) Would like statewide focus groups with all stakeholders.
- 6) Are we under-identifying? Groups seemed to be left out.
- 7) ASD checklist is the same as it was at its inception.
- 8) Looked at Special Education Enrollment Slide from Fran and feel that there is a need for a visual representation of those numbers.
- 9) Unfunded mandates, such as the reading programs coming from the State, continue to be an issue.

B. Funding

- 1) Lisa, Michael, Fran, Andy, and Patrice – looked at the subcommittee's charge and had an initial discussion about the challenges of staffing and the funding of staffing.
- 2) We want to look at the State Auditor's report on the private special education facilities. That was circulated to the subcommittee for discussion at the next meeting.
- 3) Lisa will get some information on the amount each town has lost due to the State not making its commitment to fund at four and ½ times the excess costs and the fact that we can't count on that grant.

- 4) Intention is to meet one week before each of these meetings going forward
- C. Services**
- 1) Heather, Karen, Tara, and Alicia met briefly to create a calendar of meetings. The first meeting is in person at CAS on June 2nd.
 - 2) Calendar invites were sent out.
 - 3) Bryan will appoint someone from the CSDE to all committees. He asked that the subcommittees send Bryan the invites.
 - a. Kathy Dempsey will attend the Funding Subcommittee meetings.

Fran and Andy would like this task force to be something that will bring about change. Recommendations should be heavy with data and costs associated with the recommendations. Recommendations should be significant and relevant.

- IV. Discussion of Stakeholder Focus Groups (15 minutes)
 - a. After September
 - i. Special Educators
 - ii. Directors
 - iii. Parents
 - iv. Mental Health related service professionals
 - b. Go to them with initial proposals to get their reactions.
- V. Wrap Up and Future Plans (10 minutes)
 - a. June 13, 2023 (next meeting)