

2023-24 Annual Update by the Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee

Submitted To:
The Colorado State Board of Education

By:
Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee (CSEAC)
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The Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee is staffed by
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What is the Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee?

The Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee (CSEAC) is a state level committee mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Colorado's Exceptional Children's Educational Act (ECEA). Its primary purpose is to advise the State on the education of children with disabilities. The committee meets quarterly and holds an annual planning meeting. [Restart here.](#) federal and state law. CSEAC seeks to assist the Colorado State Board of Education in meeting its responsibilities for the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Colorado's Exceptional Children's Educational Act (ECEA). CSEAC's membership is made up of individuals involved in or concerned with the education of children with disabilities. While the CSEAC has representatives from CDE, higher education, Administrative Units (AUs), and other state agencies within the state, it is primarily made up of individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities. CSEAC members are appointed by the Colorado State Board of Education.

To fulfill its obligation to provide support to the State Board of Education, CSEAC engages in the following activities:

- CSEAC may advise the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) of unmet needs within the State in the education of children with disabilities;
- CSEAC may comment publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the State regarding the education of children with disabilities;
- CSEAC may, as needed, advise the CDE on the development of evaluations and the reporting on data to the U.S. Secretary of Education;
- CSEAC may, as needed, advise the CDE on the development of corrective-action plans to address findings identified in Federal monitoring reports; and
- CSEAC may advise the CDE in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities.

Purpose

In the 2022-23 year, CSEAC held four meetings during which members broke into small groups to discuss issues that students with disabilities and their families are facing across the state. Four of these groups are reporting out updates and recommendations to provide perspectives on issues of importance of the committees.

One standing subcommittee, Public Policy & Legislation, focused on the process related to effective communication between the CSEAC and the Colorado Board of Education. The subcommittee receives verbal, quarterly updates from the Board of Education liaison who shares relevant and upcoming legislation that the group might want to advise on. The CSEAC also engages in grassroots-based topics that are discussed over the course of the year, and as mandated in CSEAC's by-laws, are to present to the Board of Education once a year.

Of most importance to the CSEAC members is the following: What guidance can CSEAC provide that is most helpful? By what method or in what period would feedback be most helpful and impactful to the State Board of Education?

Constituent and subcommittee input groups have focused on the following:

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- **Student Outcomes:** This subcommittee identified existing and potential avenues to improve parent involvement as a means of improving services and results of students with disabilities (Indicator 8) with equity of resources, with emphasis on culturally and linguistically diverse families.

- **Staff Recruitment & Retention:** This subcommittee wrote recommendations for ensuring all students with disabilities have appropriately educated/trained professionals providing a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), including recruitment, retention, professional development, and other considerations and supports.
- **Communications:** Recommended that this subcommittee of the CSEAC focus on developing relationships with rural AUs. This committee plans to support the formation of local SEACs and build a system of communication, partnering, and trust between the CSEAC and rural stakeholders.

Recommendations by the Staff and Retention Constituent Input Group

Representatives of the Colorado SEAC discussed and wrote recommendations around staff recruitment and retention to help ensure all students with disabilities have appropriately educated/trained professionals providing a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The group divided their recommendations into four categories: recruitment, retention, professional development, and other considerations and supports.

Recommendation 1: Recruitment

- Increase recruiting efforts at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) like Langston University in Oklahoma and other higher education communities with large Latinx populations. Recruiting a diverse workforce is especially important to remove barriers for access to career development as well as meeting the needs of a diverse student population.
- Target additional cities in the U.S. with comparable cost of living indexes to Colorado for recruitment.
- Use the J-2 model to obtain employees from HBCUs and Latinx universities, not just abroad. The J-2 visa is for a dependent spouse or an unmarried child who is under the age of 21 which enables them to be employed while the family is in the U.S.
- Include information during the retirement process to recruit long-term substitutes and paraprofessionals to keep seasoned teachers in the district, such as:
 - Providing information on PERA retirement and the possibilities of working a reduced schedule after retiring.
 - Offering to pay for license renewal fees for these retired teachers and special service providers whose licensure has expired.
 - Creating an expedited application and interview process to rehire retired personnel and former staff who are in good standing with the district and eligible to be rehired.
- Develop pathways to “grow-our-own” staff for greater opportunity for advancement and to reduce burn out.
 - Recruit high school students for paraprofessional positions, classroom helpers, and to fill custodial and food service vacancies.
 - Educate high school students about careers in teaching and other professions within the field of education.
 - An example of this can be found in the Durango School District. Juniors in high school have curriculum provided by the state college and taught by the district’s superintendent intended to encourage youth to pursue careers as educators while building community.

- Train substitutes for special education support.
- Pay paraprofessionals to become teachers or related service providers.
- Encourage student-teachers to enter master's programs.
- Adjust alternate-licensure program requirements at the higher-education level:
 - To allow for faster movement through programs.
 - To accommodate candidates who do not have the prerequisites currently required.
 - To offer competency-based models of learning and earning degrees.
- Market strategy ideas:
 - Encourage people to become teachers to fill the “public health emergency crisis,” like how public health campaigns are evolving.
 - Encourage people to fulfill a “social justice” need.
 - Advertise at job fairs (not just teacher job fairs) about the myriad paths to becoming an educator.

Recommendation 2: Retention

- Explore differentiated rates of pay for classified, certified, and substitute special education staff that is significant and increases at a larger rate for special education assignments.
- Offer short-term and immediate loan forgiveness in addition to Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and other incentives to increase staff retention in hard-to-fill positions.
- Extend classified pay over a 12-month period, like teacher pay.
- Add an extra hour of pay to hourly employees' workday to compensate them for additional work before or after school, special events, teacher meetings, etc.
- Embrace a strong wellness program for staff including friendly inter-district competitions, monthly challenges, and rewards/awards, etc.
- Offer to pay for license-renewal fees for teachers when theirs expire.

Recommendation 3: Professional Development

- Create mentor programs for paraprofessionals to be connected to veteran teachers and staff.
- Require behavioral support training for general education teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals to create higher safety in school for students and staff.
- Add days/hours to paraprofessional positions for more trainings as well as time for collaboration and shadowing of teachers or related service professionals, such as:
 - Operating and supporting travel on “white buses” which operate primarily for students who may need wheelchair access, etc.
 - Providing Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) training.
 - Providing training for attending IEP meetings.

Recommendation 4: Other Considerations and Supports

- Place special education administrators in the schools instead of the district offices to further support the staff and programs there. This could be accomplished by having them be itinerant between two or more schools for larger districts.

- Adjust the school week to four days with student contact and one day for staff to complete administrative duties and IEP meetings. This allows time to collaborate, train and complete tasks outside of direct support.
- Define roles of support more clearly within teams, (at the building and at the district level) to allow teachers and paraprofessionals more lateral status which could promote stronger team relationships.
- Allow for ongoing anonymous feedback opportunities to leadership for improvements.
- Explore alternative pathways, which are opportunities for financial assistance to remove barriers, such as:
 - New bill discussing allowing mental health professionals in schools
 - <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/sb23-004>
 - Alternative licensure pathways for special education instructors
 - https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprof/checklist-alt_teacher
 - Alternative licensure pathways for special service providers (SSP)
 - https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprof/authorization_tee_faq
 - Funding for alternative pathways
 - <https://www.cde.state.co.us/educatortalent/errprogram>
 - Funding for rural positions
 - <https://www.unco.edu/colorado-center-for-rural-education/stipends/rural-alternative-licensure-stipend.aspx>
- Find and create alternative teacher candidates.
- Increase flexibility of out-of-state teaching licenses to convert to Colorado licenses.
- Acknowledge the changes which arose from the pandemic and shifting procedures and policies to match.
- Recognize that students and teachers have wellness issues which must be addressed.

Recommendations by the Student Outcomes Subcommittee

The purpose of this subcommittee is to advise on the following:

- The development and implementation of the Colorado Special Education State Performance Plan.
- The improvement of academic achievement and outcomes for students with disabilities.

The intended goals are to identify existing and potential avenues to improve parent involvement as a means of improving services and results of students with disabilities (Indicator 8) with equity of resources, with emphasis on culturally and linguistically diverse families. Below are three recommendations that the subcommittee would like to consider.

Recommendation 1:

Expand how information is delivered to parents, such as:

- Use straightforward and accessible resources with visuals (not limited to information about IEPs – include public education generally, documentation required to enroll in school, etc.) presented in multiple languages and modalities; and
- Increase outreach to different points of connection (e.g., work with trusted community leaders).

Recommendation 2:

When evaluating and working to improve how schools facilitate parent involvement (Indicator 8), expand efforts to ensure that the needs of small and/or underrepresented communities are met.

Recommendation 3:

Improve monitoring of the evaluation process. Increase and improve support of families through the evaluation process, especially families whose first language is not English, including support to obtain necessary documentation, so that evaluations are completed without delay.

Closing Comments

CSEAC's leadership wants to extend appreciation and gratitude to all the members of the Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee and the Colorado Department of Education. These committed individuals continued to provide input, review proposed changes and revisions to state policies and guidelines, and create initiatives that will no doubt benefit students with disabilities and their advocates, now and in the future. Their dedication is truly appreciated and amazing.

The CSEAC also would like to thank the State Board of Education Members for considering the recommendations. The CSEAC appreciates the state board representing the voices of families, school staff, and community and providing continued support and positive change in Colorado's special education system.

Current CSEAC Members

#	Name	Position	County	Congressional District
1	Shelly Agostine	Parent	El Paso	5
2	Heather Alderman	Parent	Larimer	2
3	Julia Allison	Parent	Jefferson	7
4	Suan Archuleta	Special Education Teacher	El Paso	5
5	Kelly Balderston	Division of Youth Services	Arapahoe	6
6	Betsy Basch	Charter School Institute (CSI)	Douglas	4
7	Erin Camper	Parent	Larimer	2
8	Cori Canty	Parent	Arapahoe	6

#	Name	Position	County	Congressional District
9	Jill Choate	Institution of Higher Education	La Plata	3
10	Jessica Cuthbertson	Parent	Arapahoe	4
11	Laurie Ditterline	McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act	Denver	1
12	Amy Dobronyi	Parent	Douglas	6
13	Michel Friberg	Parent	Arapahoe	6
14	Heidi Graber	Parent	Larimer	2
15	Nicole Gross	Parent	El Paso	5
16	Samantha Hollister	Parent	El Paso	5
17	Eva Leon	Parent	El Paso	5
18	Jill Pidcock	Parent	Garfield	3
19	Amy Rosengrants-Smith	Parent	Prowers	4
20	Shannon Slone	District Charter School	Douglas	4
21	Kaegan Smith	Individual with a Disability	Larimer	2
22	Cassie Sudbeck	Parent	Denver	1
23	Amanda Summers	General Education Administrator	Jefferson	7
24	Shelli Tillery	Parent	Jefferson	7
25	Kate Tshikalu-John	Parent	El Paso	5
26	Ann Wilson	Parent Training and Information Center	Denver	1
27	Open to Fill	Parent	n/a	n/a
28	Open to Fill	Parent	n/a	n/a

#	Name	Position	County	Congressional District
29	Open to Fill	Parent	n/a	n/a
30	Open to Fill	Department of Corrections	n/a	n/a
31	Open to Fill	Private School Administrator	n/a	n/a
32	Open to Fill	Transition Services	n/a	n/a
33	Open to Fill	Special Education Administrator	n/a	n/a
34	Open to Fill	Special Education Administrator	n/a	n/a
35	Open to Fill	Special Education Administrator	n/a	n/a
36	Open to Fill	DHS, Child Welfare Services	n/a	n/a
37	Open to Fill	State Agency Financing or Delivering Related Services	n/a	n/a
38	Open to Fill	Administrator of Program for SWDs	n/a	n/a
39	Open to Fill	Administrator of Program for SWDs	n/a	n/a
40	Open to Fill	General Education Teacher	n/a	n/a
41	Open to Fill	General Education Teacher Administrator	n/a	n/a

Additional Information and CSEAC Contacts

[Click here for more information about CSEAC](#), or contact one of the following individuals:

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