

## THE WEST VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION'S RESPONSE TO THE 2016-2017 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE WEST VIRGINIA ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR THE EDUCATION OF EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The West Virginia Advisory Council for the Education of Exceptional Children (WVACEEC) is a state level committee mandated by state and federal law. Members are interested in the quality of education received by exceptional children and youth. The WVACEEC includes parents and individuals with exceptionalities, educational service providers, administrators and representatives from a variety of related agencies. Participation is statewide and representative of diverse exceptionalities. The Council schedules and conducts regional meetings across the state to seek input and gain information about programs and services for exceptional students.

The State Board of Education appreciates the efforts to collect information regarding the unmet needs of children with exceptionalities within West Virginia. The Board is pleased to respond to the recommendations presented at the Board's June 2017 meeting.

---

### IMPACT OF NEONATAL AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPOSURE TO DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND ABUSE

West Virginia has one of the highest rates of neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) in the nation. In 2013, 33.4 cases of NAS per 1,000 hospital births were reported in WV. (CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, August 12, 2016) Research finds that children who have been exposed to drugs prenatally are likely to have more executive functioning problems, including poor impulse control and emotional dysregulation, in addition to having lower language skills, visual attention, and overall school readiness than their same age peers. (Pulsifer 2008; Watson & Westby 2003; Huiznik, 2015) Additionally, children with a history of prenatal drug exposure are more likely to be faced with environmental risk factors, including abuse, neglect, and family instability, which put them at an even greater disadvantage for learning and social development. (Watson & Westby, 2003)

The Center for Disease Control reports that as many as 1 and 5 children suffer from mental disorders per year which effects their ability to learn, behave, and express their emotions. The 2016 Children's Mental Health Report identifies the lack of trained psychiatric and psychological professionals to address the needs of 77% of pre-kindergarten programs. It is projected that 12,624 child and adolescent psychologists will be needed by 2020 to meet the demand, but a supply of only 8,312 is expected.

In WV, Marshall University is leading a collaborative community response to this problem involving over 20 agencies to address the impact of pre-natal drug exposure, maternal

addiction and family supports. The collaborative is called Healthy Connections. Given the lack of access to mental health professionals, classroom teachers bear the responsibility to address the social, emotional and behavioral challenges of children.

## RECOMMENDATION

*For these reasons, the Council recommends that the WVDE use every opportunity to collaborate with Marshall University's Healthy Connections, continue support for statewide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports training and implementation, promote the use of Mental Health First Aid training for classroom teachers, and investigate methods to expand knowledge of Trauma Sensitive Schools (<https://traumasensitiveschools.org>) and encourage law enforcement agencies to implement Handle With Care.*

## RESPONSE

West Virginia has two years remaining on the Project AWARE federal Now is the Time (NITT) grant. The project focuses on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), School-Based Mental Health and Youth Mental Health First Aid state-wide to support students, teachers, schools and communities in recognizing and responding to mental health concerns among WV youth. There are three fully-funded pilot sites in McDowell, Wood and Berkeley counties. The WV Autism Training Center (WV ATC) has been provided funding to hire a PBIS Coordinator for Project AWARE to provide training and support in the three pilot counties. This coordinator also trains with the School-Wide PBIS Coordinator and the Early Childhood PBIS Coordinator statewide.

This grant also provides \$10,000 a year to the Handle With Care program. Handle With Care is currently in 50 counties in WV. The remaining 5 counties are interested in implementing the program. Additional funding may be provided to Handle With Care from the remaining funds available from the Project AWARE grant. The Office of Special Education will be presenting at the 2017 Handle With Care conference in September. The State Coordinator for Project AWARE is exploring training and support statewide for Trauma Sensitive Schools. Trauma Sensitive Schools is being implemented in the three pilot counties (Berkeley, McDowell and Wood).

School-Wide PBIS is currently in 125 schools with additional schools being trained this school year. Early Childhood PBIS is in 93 schools/programs with additional schools/programs awaiting training.

Currently, the Office of Special Education is exploring Healthy Connections to determine how collaboration can take place.

## COORDINATION OF PARENT FOCUS AND ENGAGEMENT

As the complexity of the world and society expand, the need for teachers to learn enhanced strategies to effectively collaborate are apparent. Data and evidence support the notion that

when parents are involved in the education of their children, those kids develop socially, emotionally, and cognitively better than children without a family support network. As the number of Parent Educator Resource Centers (PERCs) in West Virginia declines, the importance of every teacher's ability to communicate, engage, and encourage parent participation in education is essential. Non-profit and state agencies provide vital links between families and schools, however, these agencies are often unaware of each other. Colleges and universities may not teach the components of effective communication and the importance of listening for understanding. Online course work may inhibit practicing and learning effective communication skills. Teacher candidates need opportunities to meet with parents to experience the parental perspective of raising a child with a disability.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

***The Council recommends that the West Virginia Department of Education sponsor interagency understanding through small group discussions, and support institutions of higher education in development of communication and collaboration course work for teacher candidates designed to strengthen effective parent partnerships.***

## **RESPONSE**

The WVDE Office of Special Education (WVDE OSE) continues to strive to support our growing population of diverse students by enhancing state systems of support focused on building regional and local capacity to improve family and community engagement to improving instructional practice, student learning, and educational equity for students with special needs. The WVDE OSE employs a coordinator who is charged with developing new and innovative approaches to integrate family and community engagement practices and with working with institutions of higher education. Formally, we have provided training and technical support to county Parent-Educator Resource Centers (PERCs). As families' and student needs have shifted in the 21st Century, we have transitioned to Family and Community Engagement Resource Centers (FERCs *for short*). Through family and community engagement, we aim to provide parents and communities a cyclical connection and the information they need to be effective partners who are engaged in the educational process for the sake of supporting children's education and improving our overall educational system. Those practices include extending guidance to school districts regarding best practices on how to plan, implement, and monitor family and community engagement in meaningful ways to improve learning environments and experiences for students with special needs. These practices promote the use of technology, family and community forums, educational councils, media, and other avenues to engage families and the community. By building district level capacity, implementing and providing current and research based resources, collaborating with institutions of higher education, and influencing state policy, the WVDE OSE hopes to raise the next generation of WV schools that recognize educating students with special needs as a shared responsibility because when families, communities and schools work together, students are more successful and the entire community benefits.

## TEACHER PREPARATION: GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

As emphasis on educational environments shifts from segregation to inclusion, all teachers must be knowledgeable about special education laws, processes, and responsibilities to address the needs of children with special needs. If a student is eligible for special education, general and special education teachers must work together. The co-teaching plan that results from collaboration should reflect the expertise of both general and special education teachers.

There are innate challenges in making co-teaching effective.

- Expectations for student performance may be different.
- Time for collaboration may be limited.
- Opportunity for specialized instruction may be impeded by teacher schedules and assignments.

### RECOMMENDATION

***The Council recommends that colleges and universities be provided with guidance regarding what general education teachers need to know about special education to increase consistency among teacher preparation programs. The Council encourages university faculty participation with district and state professional learning events. Additionally, the Council recommends that appropriate co-teaching models be provided for general and special educators by the West Virginia Department of Education.***

### RESPONSE

The Office of Special Education has recently provided professional learning opportunities in Co-Teaching during the Math Academies and the New Special Educator Boot Camp. These sessions included both general and special educators as well as administrators. The Office of Special Education hosted a webinar on Co-Teaching that is archived on the Department website in the Office of Special Education at <http://wvde.state.wv.us/osp/policy2419.html>. This webinar and the referenced documents are available for the public to view at any time.

The Office of Special Education will reach out to the colleges and universities to provide information on upcoming professional learning opportunities that may be of interest to them.

### West Virginia GRADUATION 20/20

Since 2014, the Office of Special Education (OSE) has worked with national technical assistance centers and state agencies to develop a comprehensive approach for increasing the graduation rate and reducing the drop-out rate of students with disabilities. Strategies to improve graduation outcomes included local access to data reporting systems, such as, ZOOM WV and Early Warning System; school-level data analysis; regional school support specialist; and monetary incentives to pay for stipends, substitutes and activities. In two years, the

percentage of students with disabilities who graduated in four years with a regular diploma has increased from 70.25% to 76.85%. Furthermore, some districts have achieved graduation rates above 90% for students with IEPs

## **RECOMMENDATION**

*The Council recommends that the Office of Special Education continues to expand the number of schools, especially middle schools, that participate in Graduation 20/20. The Council also encourages OSE to engage elementary schools with activities and academics that focus on graduation from the beginning of educational experiences.*

## **RESPONSE**

In the revision of Policy 2419 effective August 14, 2017, transition services were changed to phase in services beginning at age 15 starting in 2018 and age 14 starting in 2019. This will be consistent with the Personalized Education Plan (PEP) that is to begin in eighth grade for all students. Also, the Office of Special Education (OSE) and the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) are continuing to collaborate on agreements for Pre-Employment Transition Services to be provided by WV DRS counselors starting at age 14.

The West Virginia GRADUATION 20/20 initiative is gradually moving down to the elementary level. Additional feeder middle schools are being added as well as elementary schools. The Office of Special Education is currently working with the Regional School Support Specialists (RS<sup>3</sup>s) to develop an implementation manual for the elementary level.

WV GRADUATION 20/20 is in its third year of implementation. There are 103 schools in 41 counties participating. 74 high schools, 23 middle schools and 6 elementary schools. It is receiving recognition at the national level.