

# **THE WEST VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION'S RESPONSE TO THE 2015-2016 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 2016 meeting.

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## **TRANSITION**

There seems to be a contradiction between the expectation for students with disabilities graduating from high school in 4 years with their cohort versus graduating with knowledge and skills necessary to successfully enter the work force, post-secondary training or higher education. This contradiction appears most blatantly in the discrepancy between student lack of academic proficiency and graduation rates. Graduation rates are excellent as noted in recent national comparisons as opposed to proficiency rates. Although the U.S. Office of Special Education requires states to collect data on the number of students with disabilities who graduate in four years, IDEA entitles students with disabilities to a free appropriate public education until the age of 21. If students need additional time to complete the requirements for graduation and demonstrate academic proficiency, they should be given that opportunity. Recent changes in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act mandate that the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) spend 15% of its annual budget on students with disabilities ages 14-21 who may be eligible for services. In West Virginia, that figure amounts to \$6,000,000. DRS guidelines, additionally, require pre-employment transition services counselors determine student eligibility by age 16. By improving the partnerships between local education agencies and division of rehabilitation services counselors, more students with disabilities will receive services leading to post-secondary employment, training, or education.

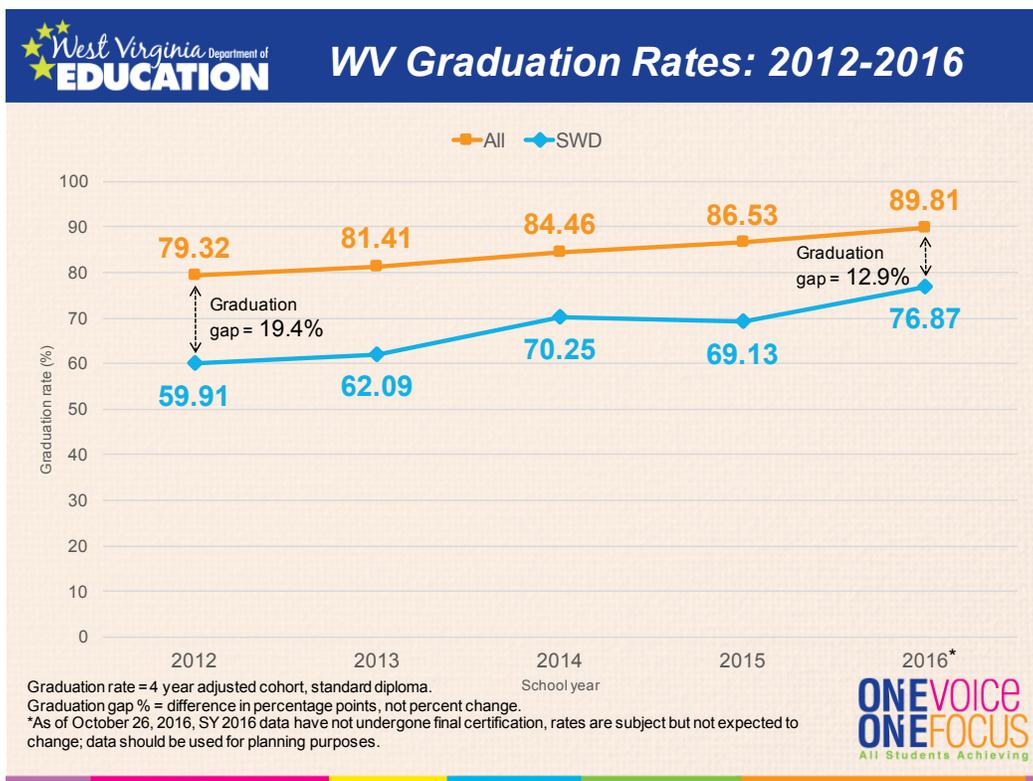
## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Council recommends that IEP Teams begin discussing student transition needs with DRS counselors no later than age 14 and earlier if needed, and use a comprehensive approach that will analyze all of the components for a successful post-secondary career, including life skills, work experience, interest exploration, and pre/post community collaboration.

## **RESPONSE**

- The Office of Special Education (OSE) and the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) are working collaboratively to develop agreements for Pre-Employment Transition Services to be provided by WV DRS counselors starting at age 14. The OSE has revised the Eligibility/Individualized Education Program (IEP) notice to include language indicating Transition Services may be discussed or included in a student's IEP Team meeting prior to the age of 16, if appropriate. West Virginia applied for intensive technical assistance from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition and was one of seven states chosen to participate. The technical assistance focuses on improved interagency collaboration that includes DRS, Parent Training and Information (PTI), Concord
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University, RESA 1, RESA 6, the West Virginia Offices of Special Education (OSE) and Career and Technical Education (CTE). At this time, a plan is being developed to address Pre-Employment Transition Services as well as evidence-based transition services. The State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), Graduation 20/20, is in the second year of implementation. There are 72 high schools and 16 middle schools participating. The second year of implementation focuses on evidence-based Transition Services. The Regional School Support Specialists (RS3s) continue to work with schools to provide coaching and resources to implement the schools' action plans. Dr. Mary Morningstar, Ph.D. from the University of Kansas provided professional learning on evidence-based Transition Services for 3 days to school teams participating in Graduation 20/20 during the KidStrong conference in June 2016. The graduation rate for all students increased from 86.4% to 89.8% in 2016. The graduation rate for students with disabilities increased from 69.13% to 76.87%.



## **RESULTS AND COMPLIANCE**

General education teachers are expected to provide grade level instruction to all students in their classrooms, however, when the number of students with disabilities is disproportional, the burden of appropriate instruction is compounded by a wider range of abilities and learning modalities. The provision of specially designed instruction in general education classrooms requires more not fewer personnel. Districts are hindered by funding formulae and limited Federal grant awards. State budget cuts filter down to districts and Federal funds have been frozen at fixed rates for a number of years. In theory, instruction in the least restrictive environment is always the objective, however, instruction must be adequate for students to progress commensurate with their peers.

The Office of Special Education has been successful in mitigating the effect of limited funding to districts by providing regional support specialists to provide professional learning opportunities for teachers relative to specific indicators (e.g., Graduation 20/20, Instructional Practices Inventory). However, the limitations on the number of personnel that districts can hire is oft times detrimental to the education of students. It is essential that the Office of Special Education provide a unified and cohesive image that emphasizes the importance of delivering comprehensive and effective educational programming while maintaining legal accountability for implementation of Federal and State laws.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Council recommends that the Office of Special Education identify means and methods of using the compliance indicators of the State Systemic Improvement Plan to determine meaningful targets for results indicators that will enhance student learning in all learning environments and result in academic achievement, social/emotional maturity, and post-secondary success.

## **RESPONSE**

- The Office of Special Education (OSE) has included both Results and Compliance Indicators in the Annual Desk Audit for several years beyond the requirements of the Federal Office of Special Education Programs. The Office of Special Education Programs has made State determinations based on both Results and Compliance for two years. Improvement plans are created by the district for indicators that are below the targets set forth by the OSE. Professional learning and other improvement activities listed in the improvement plans are then included in the financial grant application submitted to the OSE. Assigned coordinators have provided assistance to districts writing improvement plans and compliance monitors follow up with the districts during on-site monitoring.
  - The OSE is supporting districts at the Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) level by providing funding for two Regional School Support Specialists (RS3s) in each RESA and one Special Education Director. The RS3s are providing Evidence-Based Practices and coaching supports to teachers and staff to enable them to work with all students.
  - The OSE has provided funding for two Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Coordinators at the WV Autism Training Center. Thus far, 110 schools have participated in school-wide PBIS with the support of the PBIS Coordinators. The Early Childhood Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (EC-PBIS) program is being piloted in two RESAs for the 2016-2017 school year. EC-PBIS applications will be taken for the 2017-2018 school year and professional learning will begin in Summer of 2017.
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## **EARLY LEARNING**

Young children with disabilities and at-risk for disabilities in WV are experiencing increasingly complex and challenging home environments (e.g., parental drug use, poverty, foster care placements) that create significant emotional and behavioral needs for this population. Additionally, these children are struggling to become proficient readers. An early and intensive focus on preparing children to be readers is critical to ensure that children with disabilities learn to read when entering kindergarten.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Council recommends a two-fold intervention focus for our most vulnerable population:

- A. Crisis intervention training for handling immediate needs, prevention and intervention strategies through Early Childhood Positive Behavior Intervention Support.
- B. Increased implementation of evidence-based early literacy curricula with a focus on the big areas of early literacy (i.e., oral language/vocabulary, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, print awareness) to prepare children to be readers.

### **RESPONSE**

- The Office of Special Education (OSE) has provided funding for an Early Childhood Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (EC-PBIS) Coordinator at the WV Autism Training Center. The EC-PBIS Coordinator is working with RESA 3 and 6 to revise and vet the EC-PBIS program for WV. An EC-PBIS Implementation Manual will be developed and professional learning will be provided to participating schools in the 2017-2018 school year. Crisis Prevention and Intervention (CPI) is being used in each school to provide evidence-based strategies for handling crisis and immediate needs. Trainers throughout the State provide training for new crisis teams as well as updates for existing teams.
  - The OSE is partnering with the Office of Early Learning to support schools in the State in the foundations of early literacy. The OSE has provided funding for an Early Literacy Regional School Support Specialist (RS3) in each RESA with 2 in RESA 7. The RS3s are collaborating with the Literacy Specialists, funded by the Office of Early Learning, located at the June Harless Center at Marshall University. This collaboration supports the 54 participating schools with foundational literacy skills. This work falls within the Learning School model and provides resources and support for early literacy within Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The Literacy Specialists, RS3s, representatives from the Office of Special Education and the Office of Early Learning meet monthly as a PLC to gain information and resources to support the participating schools.
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## **SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICE PERSONNEL**

Classroom and transportation para-professionals (aides) are critical for meeting the needs of children with disabilities in many school settings. They provide a multitude of essential supports to students with unique and sometimes intense needs for assistance with motor skills, social and emotional skills, and learning. In recent years a discrepancy in salary classification has arisen between early childhood classroom teaching assistants, autism mentors and special education aides. It is understood that teaching assistants and mentors have acquired additional training and professional learning, however, equal opportunities should be afforded to all para-professionals thereby reducing the discrimination factor.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Council recommends that additional personnel classifications with descriptive performance and training criteria be added to salary classifications for service personnel assigned to work with students with disabilities who have an individualized education program (IEP).

### **RESPONSE**

- The Office of Special Education (OSE) is currently researching ways to provide service personnel with professional learning to enhance their credentials and elevate their salary classification. During the 2016 legislative session, a bill was drafted by the West Virginia Service Personnel Association with stakeholder input defining an Aide V as “a special education classroom aide who has elected to complete 3 e-learning classes provided through the WVDE Department of Special Education. These classes are designed to improve skills and competencies related to the provision of services to special needs students. This level is voluntary for special education classroom aides who wish to improve their skills and their salary.” In this draft, the Aide V would fall under the pay grade E. This bill was meant to add the Aide V classification to WV Code 18A-4-8 under Employment Term and Class Titles of Service Personnel definitions. The bill was not introduced in the 2016 session; however, the bill may be put forth in the 2017 legislative session for introduction. Legislation would have to occur in order to change West Virginia State Code. Requirements for coursework and pay grades will be aligned to the passed legislation.