



## Special Education Advisory Panel: Executive Committee Meeting

### APPROVED MINUTES

**Meeting Place:** Hybrid Meeting - Microsoft Teams platform (Virtual Meeting) and Physical location option: The Classroom at UVM Extension, 327 US-302, Barre Montpelier Rd. Barre, VT 05641

**Date:** Thursday, February 23, 2023 – 4:30pm to 6:30pm

**Present:** Katie Ballard, Dawn Campbell, Teagen Comeau, Crista Yagjian, Rachel Seelig, Chris Case

#### Agenda:

4:30-4:35	Call meeting to order, approve minutes, Chair updates
4:35-4:45	Public Comment
4:45-5:10	State Assessment and Alternative Assessment Presentation from AOE and discussion
5:10-5:20	Rule 4500 discussion with Chris Case
5:20-5:40	Unmet Needs/priority topic planning
5:40-6:00	Planning and discussion around full day in person June meeting
6:00-6:25	Full Panel March Agenda Planning
6:25-6:30	Public Comment
6:30	Adjourn

#### Call meeting to order, approve minutes, Chair updates:

Katie started the recording – stating they do not have quorum.

Katie- And this would be a perfect time to discuss the struggles related to it in general.

Membership- the lack of appointed memberships being moved to the Governor. Proposed members are attending meetings and not being paid and feels unfair attending meetings for months and not being paid.

Katie acknowledges the Panel can change their By-laws and what can the AOE do to assist with this process.

Chris response was that Secretary French and Katie meet regarding membership appointments being moved to the Governor for approval.

Katie- Open positions and transitions within AOE, especially State Director position – lots of roles open and people are worried about how this is impacting support for school districts and parents' ability to advocate for example their student can't go to school because they don't have a para and district does not have someone to support the student for a number of reasons. Chris- Special Education open positions: State Director is a critical position. We conducted a search last month that did not yield a candidate and will be reposting with a broader range to Federal partners, TA providers and professional organizations. Assessment Coordinator for Special Populations (coordinates Alt Assessment annually) new person will start March 31<sup>st</sup>, which we will be fully staffed, minus the State Director position.

Katie- EQS for Licensing and Data – positions are open? Chris, those are not special education positions nor his team. As other positions within AOE that are vacant: Licensing Director Patrick Halladay has left and will be replaced they presently have an Interim Director [Josh Souliere](#). DMAD Director position is open. Alt Assessment has been impacted by this, but others are helping to cover this work among the Data Team.

Chris is not sure what Katie is hearing as the Special Education Team is not short staffed excluding the State Director. If people are experiencing challenges, I don't want to contribute those to shortage within the AOE. We do acknowledge that the challenges of getting responses to the Panel's questions to the AOE and that is a communication issue which is really about the AOE Executive Leadership, and the Panel and we can certainly work to remedy. But that might be a different issue to what you might be talking about related to Parent engagement with responses or Agency support?

Katie- Clarify that she heard from people working in schools and parents that are not getting responses when contacting AOE, mixed responses, significantly delay in response and if it is not staff shortage then where is the disconnect? We want everyone to be responded to on timely accurate information. We have centralized places for people to put their questions and we have designated team members to respond to those questions. I understand that people are getting timely responses through those channels. We also have staff members tasked with specializations and those are timely as well. Things that might get dropped occasionally due to volume of questions due to understaffing not a staff shortage, we could always use more people. It would be helpful in cases where you hear people having challenges getting responses from the Agency to know what those situations are with more specific information - what was requested, what was communicated, where we see things fall down. Learning more about the nature of the problem would help us in figuring out what the degree of the issues are and how we can improve.

Crista asks where and how can she report her feedback and experiences? Chris: we have assigned regional reps who attend a regional district meetings once a month, where they share AOE information and present for the conversations between the regional administrators topics. We also have the [TA line email](#) or phone (802) 828-1256 which is monitored and responded to by the special education team. Crista recognized there is a system then. Crista talked to the Special Educator shortage and licensing and relicensing with the AOE is incredibly challenging! For my example I have been licensed for 25 years and I cannot get ahold of a licensing person, sometimes they might email me back not really answering my question I get a generic answer first and ALICE is still not Mac compatible I cannot enter my information in. I have to use someone else's computer- libraires have Mac computers. Several educators are having difficulty getting licensure and the lack of response, information for licensing and relicensing- Chris offered to connect her to the Licensing unit. Maybe someone from licensing can come to a Panel meeting and identify key questions prior to the meeting?

Crista asks training regarding on implementation on Special Education Rules changes people in the districts report they are not getting training from the AOE and are going to VSAC and Vermont Higher Ed Collaborative because they are not getting what they need from AOE. She doesn't know how to respond to them when she feels AOE is collaborative and trying, the field does not feel that way. Chris has heard that LEAs want AOE to come to districts and walk them through the process (what will this mean for the district, staff and funding models etc.) and the AOE is not in a position to provide onsite coaching to every LEA around the State. Chris Kane is in the process of putting out new resources in the next few months. We also need to separate what AOE responsibility to do and what lies with the LEA. This should be an all-LEA initiative not just the special education teams within a district.

Katie- At the end of the day the students with disabilities are the one that's that are suffering who aren't getting identified, getting services, who aren't able to access their education and if the districts can't do it and they don't have the resources and the AOE is unable to provide it. Who will provide it? Students deserve that

right for all districts following the Rules. It is unfortunate parents have to put themselves in and figuring out the process of the Administrative Complaint Process and face district retaliation when they have filed. The AOE clearly knows students are not getting FAPE and are really experiencing some discriminatory practices. Without requiring parents to go through Administrative Complaint Process that shouldn't eliminate the AOE as a State Agency from being responsible for the violations they know about. Chris- the system should take care of them, and they should not be responsible for change. The challenge we have at the Agency is unless these issues are raised by parents, we don't always know about them. We have other ways to identify FAPE denial like our Cyclic, Targeted, Selective Monitoring processes where every district get a pass every 3 years to have their performance reviewed, we have SPP/APR Indicators that give indication of systemic issues and for us to go in for a more targeted monitoring around those issues. Unfortunately, there are times we rely on LEAs to self-report but that doesn't always happen, or parents elevate their specific issues to the Agency which is not a good position for parents. VFN helps us to know these trends and partnering with parent organizations in the State is a helpful way for us bridge these gaps, but u. Katie stated that she hopes that AOE is the using the Disability Law Project and maybe DD Council that is hearing from parents regretfully some parents to do not feel comfortable with VFN for a number of reasons. Maybe the AOE could pick up on some of these issues via when parents provide technical assistance with clear documentation that shows violations that are happening and not file through with the admin complaint.

Katie asked Chris if he wanted to share his email to her prior to this meeting- Chris will be leaving the Agency to work for the Child Development Division starting March 27<sup>th</sup>. There will be an Interim Director. Chris would like to have a meeting with Katie or the Panel to discuss what he can share with AOE Leadership and their support to the Panel. Katie again stated the lack of AOE responses or attendance at these meetings for presentations and information the Panel needs to meet their federal requirements. Katie has reached out to Kat for assistance for suggestions for structure and support-she is willing to meet with the Panel. Rachel asks if someone under the special education team would represent as a liaison as that role happened prior to Jacqui. Chris will follow up on that idea and future support for the Panel.

### **Public Comment:**

No one from the public is in attendance.

### **State Assessment and Alternative Assessment Presentation from AOE and discussion:**

Chris Case presented the process and what is coming up. Ana may be able to come to the March Panel meeting regarding accommodation. The bid for contactors for the Alt Assessment and now we have Cognia to represent the Multi State Alternate Assessment (MSAA). The timeline has been a challenge, finalizing the procurement process, contract signing resulting in not being able to meet with the vendor until January. The administration window is March 13 until April 28<sup>th</sup>. AOE is working with LEAs in answering questions, getting folks set up, and totally understanding the short timeline is a burden to the field. Katie asked about communication and special education engagement. Chris- we have updated the list of Alternate and General Assessment Coordinators list, Weekly office hours on Tuesdays – FAQ document is created once a week and sent to the coordinators list. District Test Coordinators can set up profiles for anyone who will be administrating testing- those profile names will be added to our communication channel. Katie- Is there a document for accommodations and flexibility to testing. Chris- [Alternate Assessments](#), [Vermont Alternate Assessment Criteria Checklist](#). Katie asks if there is any wiggle room for testing after a pandemic, maybe opting your student out without truancy and a one-page document to list of accommodations options, this is

process for eligibility and contact for waiver. This document could be posted on the family web page and given to districts for IEP Team meetings. Chris agreed that was a good idea and working to contact and share information with people outside of the listserv. [Mabika Goma](#) can be contacted for waivers. Dawn gave district level perspective and feels accommodations and modifications are and should be happening outside of Assessment too and are. Crista agreed communication around assessment is going well and agrees to have the 1-page accommodation document. Katie would like to have the new Assessment Coordinator for Special Populations come to the May or June meeting. Teagen gave his student perspective and as a Para including the controversy of testing. Clarification by Chris that Ana could come to the March meeting and new person later.

### **Rule 4500 discussion with Chris Case:**

Tabled

### **Unmet Needs/priority topic planning:**

March, April, May, and June have 45 minutes scheduled for taskforce workgroup meetings and designate a facilitator, who's going to take notes and send out updates. Groups can be Critical Staff Shortage specifically impact on paras and subs, lack of placement options, ideas to address unmet needs of students not receiving services due to staff shortage, Independent School from approval process to oversight and special ed responsibility. Also, the State Board may reopen Bill 2200 and would like Panel to engage in that. Exclusionary Discipline and disproportionate covered impact on students MH, identify current policies and procedures equity and other lens – monitoring and data is not capturing this, ideas for multifaceted issues and involving All Brains Belong, BEST, DD Council waiting for Representative Wood's Bill to come out before we move forward., Covid Impact- procedures, Compensatory, FAPE how to address lack of access. Other category topics maybe not in these groups but important and needing feedback by the end of the year- IEP goals repeated, IEP team meetings attendance as well as challenge of what do you do and how to address issue for a team, but a student is not making progress. Committee discussed what taskforce workgroups, process, and designated people in each taskforce workgroup.

### **Planning and discussion around full day in person June meeting:**

June break into small groups to draft a response template for the feedback to the AOE before the end of the year via the subcommittees. June 1<sup>st</sup> 10-4pm meeting is In-Person and at Agency of Transportation (AOT) VTTC Room 114 A&B; AOT - VTTC Conf Rm 114, 1716 US-302, Berlin, VT 05602 and will be catered. Rachel will present SWOT and her last meeting with the Panel.

### **Full Panel March Agenda Planning:**

March beginning discussion for identifying specific Unmet Needs, identify questions and info to review and explore to provide if there is any, provide questions feedback from the groups to create future agendas- unmet needs vs compliance. Using the form that we created for personal stories. Standing Agenda to discuss- 15 min Special Education Rule Changes discussion. Alternative Assessment -10-minute presentation from Ana Russo - March meeting is 1pm-4pm. Chris will present on AOE transitions and State Director update.

### **Public Comment:**

No one from the public is in attendance.

### **Adjourn: 6:30pm**

## Meeting Schedule (hold the dates):

March 23, 2023, 4:30pm-6:30pm ([Hybrid meeting](#))

April 27, 2023, 4:30pm-6:30pm ([Hybrid meeting](#))

May 25, 2023, 4:30pm-6:30pm ([Hybrid meeting](#))

June 22, 2023, 4:30pm-6:30pm ([Hybrid meeting](#))