

Meeting Minutes

Iowa Special Education Advisory Panel

April 11, 2025

Present: Wendy Anderson, Joy Barlean, Carrie Champine, Linda Dettman, Casey Force, Rhonda Haitz, Tami Hoffman, Lori Janke, Lee Longmire, Keri Osterhaus, Sonia Reyes, Rebecca Torres, Stephanie Petrillio, Sandra Smith, Joel Weeks

Absent: Josh Bowar, Mary Jackson, Pam Litterer, Amy Llewellyn, Kim Neal, Sarah Norvell, Karen Thompson

Department Staff Present: Betsy Lin, Nancy Hunt, Beth Buehler-Sapp

Public Comment: None.

Welcome/Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Rhonda Haitz, Chair at 9:05 a.m.

Approve Agenda

A motion was made to approve the agenda by Rebecca Torres. The motion was seconded by Joel Weeks. Motion carried.

Consent Agenda

Minutes were reviewed by the panel members. Joel Weeks made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 2025 meeting. Keri Osterhaus seconded the motion. Motion carried. The minutes were approved with no suggested changes.

Presentations

Access for ALL: uPar and Read&Write – Melissa Lawson, Iowa Department of Education

MeLissa Lawson, Education Program Consultant, provided a presentation on uPar and the availability of Read&Write for Iowa districts.

Every district in Iowa has access to uPar, which provides data to support Iowa educators in determining how students may gain access to grade level text for real inclusion outcomes. It is a universal literacy screener that helps teams learn how students best understand text (reading independently or text reader). uPar also outlines evidence-based practices used to make decisions about selecting a suitable reading accommodation for students. MeLissa reviewed student data through case studies to demonstrate the impact.

Access to grade level content is a concern for all learners who are not proficient, not just those identified in need of special education services. These access needs may be addressed by assessing for and providing appropriate reading accommodations. We are proposing an Access for ALL plan that provides tools and

materials for all Iowa learners who need them. Access for ALL provides uPar and Read&Write. Upar is available to every district in Iowa - more than 100 districts have elected to use the UPAR tool. Read&Write will be available through an application process to districts who would like to focus on district-wide implementation of both tools. Read&Write is a literacy support tool that offers help with everyday tasks like reading text out loud, understanding unfamiliar words, researching assignments and proofing written work.

There was discussion among Panel members on how parents can advocate for their district's use of Read&Write. Parents can only get access to the UPAR tool if the district and the AEA have adopted it. MeLissa explained the application process for districts.

Dispute Resolution - Jen Cira and Rachel Bosovich, Iowa Department of Education

Jen Cira, dispute resolution coordinator for the Department, provided an update on her work. The Department issued an RFP to hire additional Mediators and Complaint investigators. Training has been provided to both the investigators and mediators. Jen is holding a monthly meeting with both groups and in the fall there will be a new monthly webinar series.

From July 2024-Present, there were 25 State Complaints, 20 Mediations and 19 Due Process Complaints. From July 2023-July 2024, there were 29 State Complaints, 27 Mediations and 17 Due Process Complaints.

The following results were shared:

State complaints:

- 7 active/open (deadlines extended or not yet due)
- 8 confirmed or confirmed in part
- 3 not confirmed
- 6 dismissed or withdrawn
- 1 "other" - joined

Due Process:

- 2- default
- 2 - active
- 1 - order : not confirmed
- Dismissed: (2 complainant initiated without reference to settlement; 12 were due to settlement)

Rhonda Haitz asked, how do these numbers compare to Dispute Resolution data for other states? Jen said, probably lower than our surrounding Midwest states. Rachel Bosovich said, a lot of times complaints spike at the end of the year.

Joy Barlean asked, where can we find the state complaint results? Rachel Bosovich said, not all complaint results are publicly published, only those involving due process, once they are redacted. Jen said, 80% of complaints filed were solved with mediation.

Rachel discussed a due process case with a decision issued December 31, 2024.

Gilbert Community School District, 25 DOESE0006:

Initially: Violated IDEA by failing to provide PWN within a reasonable amount of time; Amended to include

District violated IDEA by:

(Procedural)

- Implementing IEP without proper notice
- discussing accommodations for math and jazz band w/o having the math and band teachers present at the IEP meeting
- Failing to hold a resolution meeting within 15 days
- Delaying and/or destroying student records
- Failing to respond to initial and amended complaints

(Substantive)

- Failing to consider less restrictive options to accommodate student's sensitivity to noise in regard to participation in jazz and concert band

Holding: The following procedural violations occurred:

- Timely PWN
- Failure to respond to amended complaint

Findings: Procedural violations did not result in denial of FAPE or significantly impede parent's opportunity to meaningfully participate; No LRE violation; Finding of Prevailing Party Status for District

A finding of prevailing party status for the district is unique and has a high bar. In this case the parents had filed approximately 12 times in the last 2 years. The Panel had an in-depth discussion around this point.

Jen talked about the future facilitated IEP pilot program. Facilitation is a collaborative process that emphasizes shared responsibility for the development of the most appropriate IEP for the student. A team will be created and will meet during the summer of 2025. The team will research and review the evaluation of other programs across the country and create a proposal for a program in Iowa. The proposal will be presented to stakeholders for feedback. The new mediators have been intentionally trained to help build capacity for these new IEP facilitators.

Last year Rachel and Betsy discussed the new dispute resolution tools that were being built into ACHIEVE. The ACHIEVE system will have the ability to fine a request for mediation using the tool in the future. A dashboard will provide a single space for all case related information to be shared and stored for all parties and allow for tracking of dates and the completion of action steps. In addition, individuals and organizations will have the ability to file a state complaint using the new dispute resolution system in ACHIEVE. All parties involved will be able to access the state complaint and file documents, communicate with the parties and DE, and see the final decision in ACHIEVE. Jen provided screenshots of the new tool in ACHIEVE.

Adjourn

Wendy Anderson made a motion to adjourn. Lori Janke seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

Announcements

- Please nominate yourself or a colleague for Vice-Chair
- *Together We Can* conference is May 3, 2025

Future Agenda Items

- Legislation – summary of bills passed and impact of federal changes
- ACHIEVE Family Portal – data and feedback
- Behavior, Behavior Intervention, Data and Support – the role of the AEA and changes in services due to legislation
- Data around attendance law – impact on students with IEPs
- Trauma-Informed care into the IEP (Fort Madison example)

Emerging Issues

None

2024-25 Upcoming Meeting Dates

May 16, 2025