

# Meeting Minutes

## Iowa Special Education Advisory Panel

### February 28, 2025

**Present:** Joy Barlean, Carrie Champine, Casey Force, Rhonda Haitz, Tami Hoffman, Lori Janke, Pam Litterer, Amy Llewellyn, Kim Neal, Keri Osterhaus, Sonia Reyes, Rebecca Torres, Karen Thompson, Joel Weeks

**Absent:** Wendy Anderson, Josh Bowar, Linda Dettman, Mary Jackson, Lee Longmire, Sarah Norvell, Stephanie Petrillio, Sandra Smith

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

**Public Comment:** None.

### Welcome/Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Rhonda Heitz, Chair at 9:11 a.m.

### Approve Agenda

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

### Consent Agenda

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

### Presentations

#### Family Support Mentoring Website – Anne-Michelle Pedersen, Iowa School for the Deaf

Anne-Michelle Pedersen shared a presentation on the Family Support Mentoring Program. She showed the Iowa Department of Education Website and where the Family Support Mentoring information could be found. She shared that there are three different kinds of mentors; Inspire to Empower; those who do not use ASL, Deaf Mentor; those who do, and Family-to-Family which encompasses more options. She shared the different mentor opportunities and where individuals can sign up. Casey Force asked what the requirements to be a mentor are. Anne-Michelle shared all mentors need to be over the age of 18, pass a background test and be interviewed by Anne-Michelle. She also shared where individuals and families can request mentors.

Anne-Michelle also shared the different age levels for DHH resources; Early ACCESS (age birth to 3), Preschool, Elementary, Middle School, High School and transition. Under each age level, are linked resources. She used

Transition Age as an example and stressed that there are even resources post-college and before someone takes on their first job. She also shared the Deaf and Hard of Hearing events that will be held soon. Currently they will be in Des Moines and Council Bluffs. These events will be for birth- 21 with the aim of getting these families together and involved. The activities currently planned include; Bowling, Swimming, Camping and Art. They have plans to include events across all areas of the state and even include virtual options.

Casey Force asked how families become aware of things like this. Anne-Michelle said the Department is working with DHH teachers, audiologists, and being shared through IDOE and Iowa School of the Deaf.

Tami Hoffman noted that the audiologist is the key to spreading this information unless the child primarily uses ASL. She also asked what the longevity plan of this was. Anne-Michelle shared that it is up to individuals and families to utilize the program and events to ensure that the children are successful and that the parents are educated.

### **Legislative Update – Thomas Mayes, Iowa Department of Education**

Thomas Mayes shared a legislative update for the Iowa Department of Education. He shared the link to the [legislation tracker](#) and noted that there are about 151 bills relating to education. He highlighted some of the bills that would be most relevant to the Panel.

#### **HF782/SF370**

An Act relating to electronic devices in schools, including student access during instructional hours, school safety plans, and instruction related to the effects of social media in grades six through eight, and including effective date provisions. The bill would forbid electronic devices during school hours but would allow exceptions for students with disabilities and emergency situations. The Department would be required to draft a model policy that public schools can adopt or modify to be more stringent. This bill only applies to public schools. The bill has bi-partisan support.

#### **HF784/SF450**

An Act relating to education, including by modifying provisions related to mathematics instruction, civics assessments, practitioner preparation programs, and the duties of the director of the department of education. The Math Counts Act refers to universal screening and progress management for numeracy. It's a similar concept to Iowa's investment in literacy but for math. The bill also includes a requirement that requires passing a citizenship test for graduation. It includes provisions with significant intellectual ability.

#### **SF277**

An Act modifying provisions related to compulsory education, truancy, and chronic absenteeism. The bill will not require schools send notifications to families via certified mail and expands the exemptions to include military service, funerals and weddings.

Thomas also discussed the Governor's education clean-up bill which has bi-partisan support. The bill addresses finance components of the AEA reform bill and teacher salaries. It also restores Teach Iowa, an

online job posting system operated by the Department. In addition, it creates a safety valve for certain types of out-of-state placement.

### **Family Portal Launch - Shannon Grundmeier & Lisa Lohman, Iowa Department of Education**

Shannon Grundmeier celebrated the ACHIEVE Family Portal launch. To date, 88,000 invitations have been sent out and 2,300 families have signed up for portals. She noted that one of the most common barriers for parents to creating their account is that they don't have the last four digits of the state Id required. The Department included sample language and suggestions for how to disseminate this information to families directly in the launch toolkit posted on the Department website.

Shannon also noted the Department has contracted with staff to help with support from 7 am – 7 pm through the ACHIEVE Family Portal Help Desk. Sonia Reyes asked if there is assistance available for other languages. Shannon pointed out that there are resources available to help families translate the portal into other languages. The help desk is able to use Google translate to address emails that have been received in Spanish.

Rhona Haitz noted she was a part of the soft-launch and how excited she was to be able to see it. She really enjoyed the navigation feature and found it helpful. She thought it would be helpful for all families to have that. Joel Weeks pointed out that had a background in ACHIEVE but still found the family placemat with suggested exploration activities to be helpful. Lori Janke share the family portal with teachers in her district during the soft launch and received a positive response.

Kim Neal asked for additional information to explain the report fields of the ACHIEVE Family Portal reports..

### **Continuous Improvement - Betsy Lin, Angelisa Fynaardt, Mary Beilke and Kelsey Teeter, Iowa Department of Education**

Several Department staff from the Division of Special Education provided updates on continuous improvement efforts across the division and solicited feedback from the Panel.

#### **General Updates**

- SDI Coaching Network – The statewide SDI coaching network will provide an opportunity for practice coaches who are supporting implementation of the SDI Framework in one of the four focus areas to network, collaborate, and refine their SDI coaching skills with other coaches from around the state.
- *IDEA Insights Newsletter* – On January 30<sup>th</sup>, The Department launched the IDEA Insights Newsletter which is geared towards professionals serving children with disabilities. This newsletter goes out every other month. Sign up is located on the [website](#). (Browse for the title: IDEA Insights.)
- *Special Education Policy and Practice Webinar Series* – This series highlights important and emerging special education policies and how to apply them within Iowa schools. The target audience are administrators making special education related decisions. Participants can join the webinars via [Zoom](#) using the passcode 431127; [Past sessions](#) (recordings, slide decks, resources) are posted on the website.
- Teaching for Impact – Statewide training on June 5 & 6 for any and all educators, administrators, support staff, community partners, students and family members that support a learner with a

disability. Admission is at no cost. There is also a workshop, Leading for Impact, specifically for school administrators.

### Secondary Transition Updates

- 30-40 LEA/AEA staff participate in monthly Community of Practice session to support the implementation of Secondary Transition SDI courses and integrated coaching supports.
- Kelsey share the HF2545 Comprehensive Review – [Initial report](#)
- The monthly coordination between IVRS, DHHS, ASK and the DE is focusing on strengthening interagency collaboration. The team is focusing on the Local School Plan redesign, provided a work-based learning webinar and a transition focused webinar series.
- Kelsey reviewed SEAP's priorities for Secondary Transition and asked the Panel if the areas of focus have shifted and what areas should be the focus for next year.

### Implementation Plans and Progress Reports

- The team provided a statewide look at IDEA DA level 1 focus areas. Of the 228 districts designated level 1, 65% focus on K12 literacy, 23% on Secondary Transition, 7% on preschool, 2% on significant disabilities and 3% on other areas.
- All districts must complete a multi-year implementation plan aligned to the identified needs in their data review process in ACHIEVE that includes their area of focus (plus a sub-area), data summary statement, goals and actions steps.
- Progress Reports are required for all district at the end of each academic year. All reports are submitted in ACHIEVE. The purpose of the report is to enable districts to reflect upon and assess their implementation of Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) as part of IDEA DA. The Progress Report is divided into five domains of SDI implementation: leadership, professional learning, coaching, assessment, and district implementation plan.
- There is a feedback loop with systems coaching which is completed by the Regional Special Education Director or Education Program Consultant with an AEA staff member. The implementation plan may be adjusted based on feedback.

### Division Hiring Update & Initial Outcomes for the Year

- Regional Special Education Directors are in place at each of the 9 AEAs
- Staffing Update: Vacancies (44% staffed)
  - Special Education division: 62 total FTE with 27 hired/onboarding and 35 vacancies;
  - Regional team: 49 FTE with 22 hired/onboarding and 27 vacancies;
  - Central team: 13 FTE with 5 hired/onboarding and 8 vacancies
- Angelisa reported on the initial outcomes of the Division of Special Education.

### AEA Accreditation

- Division staff are currently completing AEA accreditation visits at all nine AEAs.
- The process began with a pilot in Great Prairie and Mississippi Bend AEA. The process was adjusted based on the pilots.
- The remaining visits will be completed in April and May with a final report to the Board of Education in July.

### Special Education Council

Betsy lead a discussion on the Special Education Council that was created during the last legislative session. The Panel compared and contrasted the responsibilities of the Council with SEAP and talked about recommendations for moving forward.

### **Announcements**

Teaching for Impact will be June 5 & 6. SEAP members are welcome to attend.

### **Future Agenda Items**

None

### **Emerging Issues**

None

### **2024-25 Upcoming Meeting Dates**

April 11, 2025

May 16, 2025