

Meeting Minutes

Iowa Special Education Advisory Panel

January 12, 2024

Present: Wendy Andersen, Jennifer Anderson, Joy Barlen, Dawn Bonsall, Carrie Champine, Carole Cherne, Johnna Deaton-Davis, Andrew Dewein, Casey Force, Lori Janke, Rhonda Haitz, Tami Hoffman, Jessica Iverson, Mary Jackson, Amy Knupp, Amy Llewellyn, Kim Neal, Keri Osterhaus, Anne Michelle-Pedersen, Sonia Reyes, Stephanie Smith, Rachel Terry, Karen Thompson, Rebecca Torres, Joel Weeks, and Doug Wolfe.

Absent: Shawn Datchuk, Pam Litterer, Lee Longmire, Sarah Norvell, and Sandra Smith.

Department Staff Present: Barb Guy, Nancy Hunt, Beth Buehler-Sapp

Public Comment: Carlyn Crowe, Public Policy Manager – Iowa Development Disabilities Council and Heather Sievers, parent – Altoona, IA (Full text of the public comments are at the end of the meeting minutes.)

Welcome/Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Dawn Bonsall, Chair at 9:03 AM. The meeting was held virtually due to hazardous blizzard conditions across the state.

Approve Agenda

A motion was made to approve the agenda by Sonia Reyes. The motion was seconded by Anne-Michelle Pedersen. Motion carried.

Consent Agenda

Minutes were reviewed by the panel members. Joel Weeks made a motion to approve the minutes from the November 2023 meeting. Jessica Iverson seconded the motion. Minutes were approved.

Focused Monitoring Review Question - Barb Guy, Iowa Department of Education

IDEA DA has been discussed in past meetings, including our general supervision system and professional development. In the past, we had a 5-year cycle for IEP reviews but have moved away from that practice due to human resources needed as well as a lack in the kind of change we are wanting to see. The Department still conducts site visits and IEP reviews when needed, however the process has been varied and documented in various ways. We are working towards building a more consistent process.

The focused monitoring process that includes interviews, data reviews and document reviews (which is really the IEP) has been built in to ACHIEVE.

Barb Guy asked the Panel to review the provided Focused Monitoring Review Questions. There are 5 areas (Appropriate Evaluation, Individualized IEP, Meaningful Participation, LRE, and System of Transition Services); with subsets of questions in each area.

The Panel was divided into breakout rooms and discussed the following questions for their assigned area: What are you curious about? What is missing? Is it comprehensive? What will educators, principals and administrators know about this area? Each group reported out to the larger Panel with their thoughts on the questions.

Continuous Improvement: State Processes – Director Snow, Iowa Department of Education

Director Snow attended the meeting to revisit the conversation around the achievement gaps experienced by students with disabilities in ISASP and also NAEP data. We have a strong focus on narrowing/closing gaps for students with disabilities. Director Snow discussed the proposal for AEA alignment which looks at ways to meet our shared goals. The goal is to improve the quality of services supporting students with disabilities, target resources to providing services to students with disabilities and ensure decisions are made by those closest to students with disabilities in order to help districts to address the gaps.

We saw discrepancies in both math and ELA. Iowa students rank 15th in the nation in 4th grade reading while students with disabilities ranked 40th (Nation's Report Card). Across NAEP testing cycles in 2017, 2019 and 2022, students with disabilities in Iowa ranked 30th or worse on 10 of 12 assessments. Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) showed a 44% proficiency gap for students with disabilities as compared to overall student results.

Under the alignment proposal, local school boards and districts will be able to:

1. **Opt-out:** Choose to receive all special education funding intended for your child to directly serve your child,
2. **Hybrid:** Contract with an AEA and send a portion of the special education funding intended for your child to an AEA to help support your child, or
3. **Opt-in:** Choose to fully participate in the AEA system and send all special education funds intended for your child currently received by the AEA to the AEA to serve your child in partnership with an AEA.

This proposal is focused on Part B. Part C will continue to be provided by AEA as it is now.

Director Snow clarified information regarding the alignment, answered questions and listened to Panel members feedback. We will bring any new/additional information to the Panel at our February meeting.

Secondary Transition Professional Learning Packages – Kelsey Teeter, Iowa Department of Education ([Slide Deck](#))

Kelsey Teeter is new to the Bureau serving as the Secondary Transition Consultant. She is focused on IDEA DA for secondary transition, SDI content lead for Secondary Transition, supports work on graduation requirements, 4+ Services, VR connections and college and career readiness. Kelsey shared her background with the Panel.

Under IDEA '04, Secondary Transition services are a required component of Special Education that ensures we are individualizing this vision for learners with IEPs. Secondary Transition refers to the

planning process for moving from high school to post high school outcomes. Per the Iowa Administrative Rules of Special Education, this planning process begins no later than the student's 14th birthday and can even begin sooner, if determined appropriate by the IEP team.

When a student with an IEP enters the Secondary Transition planning process, there is a shift in the focus of the IEP. We begin to look at and intentionally plan for postsecondary outcomes in the areas of living, learning and working. The postsecondary expectations (PSEs) are the core of the IEP planning process. The IEP team uses the PSEs to guide the development of the IEP to address the student's plans for life beyond high school. With a focus on outcomes, the IEP team can identify what Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) may be needed, as well as identifying any services, supports or linkages that the student may need for postsecondary success. Ultimately, each student should leave high school with a plan for reaching their postsecondary goals.

In Iowa, through IDEA-DA, we are focusing on outcome data and moving away from compliance driven work. And we are increasing support and professional learning around the practices that support quality secondary transition planning. Although compliance is still required and monitored, we are intentionally focusing development around outcome monitoring. Quality transition IEP is still important. ACHIEVE is helping us collect the data so we can focus more on strategies and instruction needs.

Kelsey discussed the 3-year determination data B1 (5-year graduation rate), B2 (dropout rate) and B14 (postsecondary outcomes) and the data elements that are included in the Data Review Protocol (DRP).

Course 1 of the secondary transition professional learning packages, delivered in November, focuses on the [SDI Framework for Secondary Transition](#) and how to use it. Course 2: Foundations for Career Technical Learning, Course 3: Foundations for Work Based Learning and Course 4: Foundations for Postsecondary Education Preparation will be delivered in February.

Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS): Realignment & Vision – James Williams & Mary Jackson, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (Slide Deck)

Dr. James Williams, the new Division Administrator at the Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) was introduced to the Panel. Dr. Williams shared his background and experience with the membership. Mary Jackson and Dr. Williams shared information regarding the realignment of IVRS with Iowa Workforce Development on July 1, 2023. There is a national problem with a shortage in providers, which is true, in Iowa as well. IVRS has moved quickly to integrated as much as we possibly can with workforce programs. There are many amazing workforce programs that do not serve people with disabilities, now we can really co-serve, co-locate our offices and services. IVRS is working to improve capacity. As programs and services are being improved, more people are applying for them; however, the FTE has not changed.

Things IVRS is working on:

- Focusing on what we can do to be more efficient with the resources we do have while also advocating for change.
- Continue to strengthen our relationship, with the Department of Education, and other groups and organizations to make sure we are responsive to the needs shared with us.
- Creating a new remote counseling unit with counselors who work fully remote to deploy across the state.

- Expanding their capacity to support businesses. We help businesses create opportunities for individuals with disabilities. We are expanding our capacity in this area, so that we are able to develop more relationships with more businesses.
- Transition services-we are a national leader in Pre-Ets and transition services, but there is always a way to do more; expand our capacity and ask for more resources.

In the realignment IVRS moved from IDOE to IWD, so there is a consent for release of information that will be needed. The consent allows for communication about the student between the high schools, AEAs and VR staff. This will allow IVRS to determine appropriate timelines for connecting the student to VR services. The form is in ACHIEVE for students on IEPs. The team is working on getting the consent form to schools for students on 504 plans.

Announcements

None

Future Agenda Items

None

Emerging Issues

None

Adjourn

Joel Weeks made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Karen Thompson seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 2:03 pm.

2024 Upcoming Meeting Dates

February 23, 2024

April 5, 2024

May 10, 2024

Public Comments – Written Statements

Comment #1 – Heather Sievers

My name is Heather Sievers of Altoona Iowa. I am a registered nurse and a manager of healthcare safety and quality improvement. I am a mother of a child named Rowan with rare genetic disabilities and the founder of Advocates for Iowa's children on Facebook.

I will start today by sharing that our special needs continue to grow across the state of Iowa, and this is no surprise to anyone here. Our teachers and our children are struggling. Our special education teachers are so important, yet we continue to cut funding and services without having concrete solution-based action plans to close existing gaps. This new bill cutting down the services of the AEA just creates more gaps. We need a voice, we need some real answers, and we need some real action plans from our lawmakers. If we continue to cut, what is the plan to care for the growing needs of our communities, teachers, public schools and our children?

During Gov. Kim Reynold's Annual Condition of the State address this week, she states that she is not cutting a dime from special education funding as part of this new bill, but she negated to mention that is because she has already passed the shocking funding cuts with the last legislative session. Back in 2016, 80% of our schools (i.e., our rural communities) were already functioning at a \$95 million deficit to meet our communities' special education needs, yet our lawmakers have continued to cut funding and services year after year, ~7.5million annually for last 2 decades. With the last session, a shocking \$30 million above the expected cuts.

Now this new bill will further dissolve the AEAs ability to serve and close gaps in the communities. "Parent's Choice, School Choice": these are the key words we continue to hear from our lawmakers and Gov. Kim Reynolds. Saying this bill supports "choice" makes little sense when the services are just being cut down and further limited without any of those impacted having a seat at the table. This bill reduces choices, especially access to services rural communities have relied on for decades.

Media services are one of the AEA services that the bill plans to cut. I spoke with one of our very amazing special education teachers from Centennial Elementary School. She said that she relies heavily on the AEA's media services that would cost her so much more to even get communication books needed for her special education classrooms. She relies on the AEA for assistive technologies and teaching her how to use them with her students who need speech or communication support. My daughter couldn't get her own assistive communication device through the state for 2 years, and the AEA was able to provide a device to give my daughter a voice when the waiver programs were failing to provide those resources during a time when early intervention is so critical to the future of our children's ability to succeed. Families are stuck on 2.5-3 year wait lists to get children of disabilities on government waiver programs, and they are struggling to navigate a very complex and unforgiving system that delays families' abilities to get access to services, technologies, and critical early intervention. Again, AEA helps bridge the gap while families otherwise would have very limited support.

Lastly, Gov Kim Reynolds states that the AEA is not improving performance and our Iowa special education children are performing at lower than the National average to support this point. I actually see national data showing that we in Iowa have dropped overall from 4th nationally in performance down to 24th according to the respected US News and World Report. This is a systemic problem that cannot be blamed on the AEAs, which have served as the primary organization that resources our schools' needs. According to the Dept of education Iowa School Performance Profiles reports, it becomes very clear that the AEA cannot be blamed for declining performance in schools and that if anything, the AEA is helping keep our special education children aligned with the performance of their peers.

The data available to the public is only available from 2018 forward and shows that special education proficiency performance has not declined at the same rate as the proficiency scores for children overall between 2018-2023, while the demographics have not significantly changed during this period (i.e., our low socioeconomic status remains at 40-43% of our population, % of disability population remains ~13% and the White populations remains between 70-75% of our overall population). Again, the fact that 40- 43% of our Iowa population is low socioeconomic status lends itself to a clear systemic problem that is impacting our school performance overall and suggests that cutting services to our schools is not the answer.

Example: We have seen a 10% decline in our mathematics proficiency overall when comparing 2018 performance to 2023 performance, with our English learners declining ~13% from 2018, low socioeconomic status by 10% but our special education population only declined ~8% during the same timeframe. This data debunks the statements of Gov. Kim Reynolds.

I am here to say we need a voice in this process. And we need help slowing down the progression of this bill until we can truly understand its impact and to help get the voices of our communities, teachers, AEAs and families impacted by disabilities at the table to create meaningful and actionable plans to close gaps and resource our schools better. Thank you.

Comment #2 – Carlyn Crowe

My name is Carlyn Crowe and I'm the Public Policy Manager with the Iowa Development Disabilities Council. I'm going to start out my comments by announcing that the DD Council will be hosting a town hall meeting to discuss AEAs and Special Education in Iowa on Thursday, Jan. 18 at 6:00 p.m. The town hall will be hosted by three advocates who are parents of students with developmental disabilities. Also representatives from the AEAs and members of the legislature have been invited to make comment and we will extend invitation to the Department of Education.

The purpose of the town hall coincides with my reason to make comment today. Our work at the Iowa DD Council is to assist Iowans with developmental disabilities and their family members to be self advocates and leaders in the decision-making processes that affect them. The purpose of our town hall meeting is to give these self advocates and family advocates a place to have their voices heard. At the end of last year's legislative session when the AEA's budget was cut by \$30 million more than what was expected to be cut and when that cut was introduced and passed before there was time to comment, the voices of those affected was left out of the decision-making process.

Fast forward to December when the Governor announced that AEAs were going to be reviewed and audited. And she announced, without reference, that special education students in Iowa were falling behind their peers in other states. This was new information to many and we were unsure where this information was coming from. We were left out of the process.

This week, the Governor announced a major overhaul of AEAs and special education in Iowa. The next day a 123-page bill about major changes to AEAs and special education in Iowa was introduced in the legislature. Surprising yes, but mostly because those affected were left out of the decision-making process.

Significant changes to special education in Iowa have been proposed and are being rushed through in a process that has left those most affected—students and their families—out of the process. This is not the democratic process we expect and rushed legislation seldom makes for good policy. Last session we asked lawmakers to not make decisions FOR people with disabilities, but to make decisions WITH them. I'm asking this panel to advise this department, the legislature and the governor that we all need to have a seat at the table and make decisions about our children together. For this legislation and what's to come.