

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF PUPIL SERVICES ADMINISTRATORS
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
May 1, 2015

The following is a summary of the various activities of the OAPSA Executive Director from the February 2015 Executive Board meeting and OAPSA Conference to the present; approximately two and one-half months. Further detail is available upon request.

After the February OAPSA conference, I followed through with concerns about SSTs that were expressed to me during that meeting. There were two SSTs mentioned in particular that had little emphasis on, or programming and resources directed toward, special education-related issues. I shared these concerns with Sue Zake and subsequently talked with her, saying that only two SSTs were identified at that point, but there could be more. In balance, I acknowledged there are several SSTs that have a very high level of satisfaction relative to programs and resources in the area of special ed. That discrepancy highlights our concern that the focus of services provided by SSTs throughout the state varies considerably. This is especially relevant because the majority of funding for SSTs comes from federal IDEA-B dollars.

After talking with several others regarding the way in which SSTs are evaluated it became clear that the evaluation process currently in place didn't appear to identify some of the concerns of pupil services / special ed administrators relative to SST programs and resources. I then reviewed all 16 SST evaluations available on the ODE/OEC website that were conducted by OEC for FY 14. In particular, I was looking for indications that the evaluations covered areas related to special ed programs, services and/or resources that were targeted toward students with disabilities, intervention specialists, and special ed / pupil services administrators. For each of the evaluation report items listed in the "strengths" summary and each in the "improvement" summary, the numbers of references made related to general education were counted as were the numbers of references related to special education. Overall, there was a significant difference with relatively few references related to special ed with the vast majority of references pertaining to overall "school improvement". This gives the appearance that SSTs sometimes do not include special education to any meaningful extent within their operational focus.

That information was shared with Sue Zake and she and I have a meeting set in early May to discuss these concerns. My hope is that we can look more closely at the SST evaluation process (e.g., "customer satisfaction" surveys) in order to identify gaps that may exist in terms of evaluating the level of satisfaction that special ed administrators and intervention specialists have related to their SST's programs, services and resources. That would help make the SST evaluation process more accurate and would hopefully lead to changes for certain identified SSTs.

On March 6th there was a meeting and/or conference call for members of the Committee of Practitioners (CoP) related to ODE submitting a waiver extension for ESEA / NCLB. Dr. Karen Hall, OAPSA's primary representative to the CoP, attended that meeting and I participated in the conference call. Karen

will be presenting a summary of that meeting at our May 1st business meeting. Another meeting of the CoP that had been scheduled for late March was rescheduled for a later time.

On March 10th, I attended the third meeting of the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) team in Columbus. I am serving on that team as OAPSA's representative. There are about 30 people involved in this process, about half of whom are from various divisions within ODE. The other half represents a mixture of SST, ESC, parent, and statewide organization representatives. SAPEC members were also invited to this meeting. Lisa Bruening is OAPSA's representative to SAPEC and she attended this SSIP meeting.

Sue Zake opened the meeting and explained that the work of the team will involve a focus on results driven accountability. We are now in Phase 1. Next year is Phase 2 and then there is a multi-year phase lasting until 2020. The process will involve shared learning, partnerships, and innovative practices.

The strategic focus that was selected is Early Literacy. This goes up through grade three and begins at the preschool level or even before. Sue and Kara Waldron talked about the background of the process thus far. There were two surveys starting in August 2014, a meeting in September, and another in October. This is the 3rd meeting of the whole team although there have been meetings of the core team during the interim.

Ann Skaggs presented many charts and graphs proving information about factors which influence progress made by students. Among the most influential, in both negative and positive terms, was the student's level of poverty.

A new term is SIMR: State-Identified Measurable Results. Wendy Stoica described the process of identifying and setting SIMRs. Part of the challenge is to define subcategories of SWDs that will be priorities. Certain school districts will be targeted for involvement in the process. There was small group discussion of SIMR and its rationale and an opportunity for brief sharing at the end of the session.

Next, Sue talked about improvement strategies and "Theory of Action". Improvement strategies addressed identifying the root causes of low performance in reading & literacy. Using data analysis, in small group discussions we talked about how improvement strategies would address needs and build capacity within school districts. We also talked about implications at the state, district and school levels.

The Theory of Action we worked on takes into consideration the five areas known as "deep drivers" (highly influential to success): Parent Partnerships; Teacher Capacity; Collaborative Structures; Multi-Tiered Systems of Support; and Characteristics of Effective Schools.

During an earlier small-group session, each group identified factors within one of the five above categories that would be improvement strategies. Poster sheets listing these factors were placed on the walls around the room. The whole team then walked around the room and each person had a sticker/marker to place on the element on each of the poster sheets that he/she felt was the most critical. These were analyzed and discussed.

Wendy and Jo Hannah Ward gave a presentation on infrastructure analysis. What are the factors within particular organizations that either have a positive or a negative impact. In small discussion groups we

then talked about infrastructure strengths that should be leveraged by OEC and also what weaknesses or barriers need to be addressed. Also included was a discussion on national, state and local infrastructure resources and supports needed to improve performance results in the area of early literacy.

Sue concluded the meeting by summarizing what we accomplished during the sessions and also looking at next steps. OEC will be submitting the final report for Phase 1 to OSEP by April 1st. The SSIP team will continue to meet on a quarterly basis. Targets will need to be set for our SIMR. It is expected that an early literacy measure will be added to “district determinations” so progress can be tracked on an annual basis.

On March 24th, I attended the Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities (OCECD) Annual Meeting in Columbus. In addition to the regular agenda items, there were two speakers that provided important information regarding developments related to ESCs and also the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities.

Craig Burford, Executive Director of the Ohio Educational Service Center Association (OESCA) started with the current status of the budget. He distributed a PowerPoint handout that describes the Governor’s priorities and also includes details regarding ESC funding. Craig also included a copy of his recent testimony. The proposed budget includes a 25% cut in ESC funding with the expectation that those funds would instead go to school districts which could choose to purchase services from ESCs, from other sources, or provide the services themselves. In the last budget there were reductions in preschool unit funding and certain supervisory services funding, both of which had a negative impact on many ESCs. The governor’s proposed budget includes a funding rate for ESCs of \$25 per student (ADM) in the first year and \$20 in the second. In this proposed budget, high performing school districts would be able to opt out of affiliation with ESCs. OESCA is asking to have that provision removed. They are also asking for full funding for the 6-weight cost-based special ed formula.

Gary Tonks, Executive Director of the ARC of Ohio, had just returned from a meeting regarding Medicaid. There are more changes going on now in the DD system than its history. Medicaid changes to their Home and Community Waivers eligibility are significant. It is the position of Medicaid that whatever agency provides case management services should not also provide direct services because of an inherent conflict of interest. Combining these services is a very common practice in Ohio. The DD Department is developing a corrective action plan to respond to this supposed conflict. Medicaid is requiring that changes must be made within 5 years and they appear to have taken a non-negotiable stance. The US Department of Justice is alleging that current DD service operations create a segregated environment especially with the workshop settings. There appears to be a legal challenge from Disability Rights to desegregate the various DD operations including workshops, group homes, Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs), and others. Ohio has more ICFs that are considered “institutions” than any other state. These are 60% federally funded and 40% state or locally funded. Waivers give more options than ICFs, and are intended to keep people out of institutions. Waiver services can’t be provided on or even adjacent to ICF or workshop operations. There are 42,000 people on waiting lists for waivers. Gary distributed a chart listing the various waivers that are available.

Currently, there is great controversy over the status of independent providers that currently are providing waiver services. The IRS is moving toward having all independent providers be more regulated and have income taxes, Social Security, etc. withheld from their pay. It is proposed that fiscal intermediaries

will handle the financial paperwork but there is no plan in place at this time to have fiscal intermediaries provide these services and there are no budget funds available to pay for such services. This creates very complex issues with independent contractors (LLCs, etc.) whose options will be compromised. There was also discussion about the Medicaid School Program (MSP) and the legislation that has been introduced. There are several new areas of service that are proposed to be included relative to the use of unskilled personnel. An out-of-state Medicaid billing service appears to be pushing the current legislation and they have made claims of a very large financial incentive that will result if the legislation passes. A fiscal analysis by another source projects a much smaller financial return. There are concerns that the current ODE/OEC infrastructure within the MSP and the school districts providing and billing for services is not sufficient to add the “unskilled” category and there is no plan in place to provide the necessary training and supervision for the proposed unskilled personnel positions. Licensure restrictions also affect this potential change. There are many professional liability implications that are potential problems. Professional organizations need to be on top of this.

There are also concerns regarding the way in which Medicaid reimbursement is used by school districts. In many cases, these funds are put into the school district’s general fund rather than supporting special ed. Overall, this often creates considerable frustration and disappointment.

A total of 15 OAPSA members signed up for Ashland University graduate credit; eight have registered for two hours of graduate credit meaning they must attend all five days of meetings (two days in February). Seven have registered for one hour of credit meaning they need to attend at least three conference days to earn the credit. I have been in communication with them both in February and in April in order to summarize their status relative to attendance and the need to submit a reflection paper after the May meeting.

I participated in an Executive Board conference call on April 22nd.

Submitted by Dr. John Opperman
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