



**South Carolina Advisory Council  
For Educating Students with Disabilities  
Annual Report 2024-25**

Dear Superintendent Ellen Weaver and the South Carolina State Board of Education:

On behalf of the South Carolina Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities (Advisory Council), I am pleased to submit this report summarizing the Advisory Council's activities and accomplishments from July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025.

The past year has been another exceptional opportunity for collaboration between the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), Office of Special Education Services (OSES) and the Advisory Council. Membership of the Advisory Council includes parents of students with disabilities, individuals with disabilities, K–12 general and special educators, school district administrators, advocates, representatives of nonprofit organizations, representatives of higher education, and governmental service providers from throughout the state.

The majority of the work of the Advisory Council is done by five committees: Executive, Preschool, Professional Development, Safe Schools and Mental Health, and Transition and Self-Advocacy. Every Advisory Council member participates in at least one committee.

The full Advisory Council meets four times a year and is open to the public. We encourage anyone with an interest in special education to attend and present their concerns and suggestions for improving opportunities for students with disabilities.

The Advisory Council appreciates the support, information, and guidance provided by the SCDE, OSES as we strive together to make a free and appropriate public education a reality for all students in South Carolina. A special note of thanks goes to the following people for their continuous commitment to the operation of the Advisory Council: Peter Keup, Director of the OSES, and Cheryl Fitts, OSES Advisory Council Liaison.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Kreh Beck", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ms. Susan Kreh Beck, Chair  
South Carolina Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities

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# **SC Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities 2023-2024 Annual Report**

## **I. Advisory Council Mandate**

In accordance with Section 300.167–300.169 of the final regulations of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004* (IDEA '04) each state is required to establish and maintain an advisory council for the purpose of providing guidance with respect to special education and related services for students with disabilities. The South Carolina Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities (Advisory Council) works in collaboration with the Office of Special Education Services (OSSES) of the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE).

## **II. Vision**

The Advisory Council envisions a world where all students are respected and challenged, where the needs of all students are met, and where the aspirations for success of all students are fulfilled.

## **III. Mission**

The Advisory Council's mission is to make recommendations that impact decisions made on behalf of students with disabilities to enhance the quality of educational services they receive and to enable them to reach their individual potential.

## **IV. Advisory Council Membership**

The members are selected on the basis of their knowledge of, or experience in, the education of students with disabilities. Members are broadly representative of South Carolina's population regarding developmental, physical and mental disabilities, race, ethnic background, gender, and geographic location. Representation of the Advisory Council is established by statute to include parents of students with disabilities, individuals with disabilities, K-12 general and special educators, school district administrators, advocates, representatives of higher education, and governmental service providers. The majority of members must be parents or individuals with disabilities.

A formal application process is used by the Executive Committee to provide recommendations for appointment by the Superintendent of Education. New members are appointed in July of each year and serve for a three-year period.

## **V. Public Participation**

All Advisory Council meetings and agenda items are announced in advance of each meeting to afford interested parties a reasonable opportunity to attend. A public comment period is provided at each meeting. The Advisory Council takes all testimony under advisement and forwards comments to committees, agencies, or departments as appropriate.

## **VI. Public Comments**

Opportunities for public input into the activities of the Advisory Council are important. Individuals, groups, or organizations may address the Advisory Council in the following ways:

- In person: During the Public Comment period outlined in the agenda the person providing public comment may join the virtual platform to issue their public comment or appear in person in the case of in-person meetings.
- In writing: Public comments may be submitted electronically or through the US Mail addressed to the Advisory Council liaison at the OSES or the Chairperson of the Advisory Council.

During the 2024-2025 school year, the Advisory Council received four requests for public comment. For the August 2024 meeting, there were two public comments. First, Senator Stephen Goldfinch along with constituents Christine and Andy Roberts commented about the current state of providing services for students with dyslexia in Horry and Georgetown Counties. In Georgetown, the district's solution is to bus students great distances for services for there are no teachers who are certified in Orton Gillingham who are able to provide appropriate intervention. The Professional Development Committee took up this issue. Second, Genia Batson also provided public comment. She was concerned about the SLD category of the new SEED document. Specifically, Ms. Batson was concerned that by not utilizing a discrepancy model, where one compares a student's ability to their achievement, many dyslexic students, particularly those that are high achieving students, will not be identified under the new requirements. She fears that this new system would result in more Independent Educational Evaluation requests, more due process cases, and, in the long run, more students filtering into the penal system.

For the October 2025 meeting, which was held in person, there were two more public comments. Mrs. Amy Hibbs from Simpsonville submitted a public comment via email for the chair to read. Her son, an eighth grader with cerebral palsy and Cabeza's Syndrome, is in an ID moderate self-contained classroom. He is also nonverbal. On September 11, Mrs. Hibbs was informed that her son's teacher was reported for physical and verbal abuse. She also viewed evidence that her son was one of the teacher's victims. While current mandated reporters are trained to look for suspected abuse in the home, Mrs. Hibbs asserts that additional training is needed. Educational professionals need more training about suspected abuse observed in the school environment. Second, Mrs. Robin Blackwood from Greenville submitted a public comment via email for the chair to read.

She has a 15-year-old son with Fragile X Syndrome. She would like to see the South Carolina Department of Education create Special Education Advisory Councils at the district level.

There were no public comments submitted for the January or March meetings.

## **VII. Committees**

The **Executive Committee** directs the business of the Advisory Council to include developing meeting agendas, overseeing the nomination process, setting the calendar, reviewing the by-laws and policies, and developing the annual report. This committee also represents the Advisory Council in a variety of state-level activities.

The **Preschool Committee** works to improve the identification of preschool age children with special needs, improve access to inclusive practices and programs, and ensure the prompt delivery of services.

The **Professional Development Committee** collaborates with the SCDE and higher education to improve and expand the delivery of information regarding special education issues, legal issues, and best practices to all teachers, administrators, and general public.

The **Safe Schools and Mental Health Committee** collaborates with state and local agencies that provide services to students, families, and schools in the area of mental health, bullying prevention, and seclusion/restraints.

The **Transition and Self Advocacy Committee** works to research and identify the unmet transition services needs of students with disabilities and to disseminate information about successful transition programs and services.

## **VIII. Communications of the Council**

To encourage the participation of all members in the Advisory Council's activities, and to keep the public informed and involved in identifying the unmet needs of students with disabilities, a variety of means of communicating and disseminating information is used.

- The Advisory Council utilized conference calls and e-mails to conduct business, review information, receive updates from the OSES, and expedite decision-making.
- The Advisory Council worked with OSES to maintain a Council library to house important documents and presentations.
- The Advisory Council worked to update the web page at the SCDE, OSES's website, to increase the presence of the Council.
- The Advisory Council prepared the Annual Report for submission to the Superintendent of Education to formally inform the SCDE of the unmet needs of

students with disabilities and to make recommendations for addressing those needs.

- The Advisory Council maintained minutes of each meeting of the Advisory Council and its committees. The minutes are available to the public online and upon request.

## **IX. Activities and Accomplishments**

During the period covered by this report, Advisory Council members participated in the following activities:

### **General Activities of the Council**

- Conducted four meetings held either virtually or in person to carry out the work of the Council.
- Received information from the OSES concerning the State Performance Plan (SPP), the Annual Performance Report (APR), the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), report from the SCDE Office of General Counsel regarding the legislative session and provided comments.

### **Executive Committee**

The committee conducted four executive meetings to set the calendar / agenda, made recommendations for membership, reviewed bylaws, and performed oversight of the activities of the Advisory Council.

### ***Preschool Committee***

The Preschool Committee welcomed new and returning members in August 2024 and provided background on the committee for new members. During the first meeting, members shared updates on statewide early childhood efforts. Highlights included: discussion of the upcoming 3<sup>rd</sup> annual SC Early Childhood Inclusion Conference hosted by South Carolina Partnerships for Inclusion (SCPI), updates from the Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children around our state's data on preschool suspensions and expulsions, and implementation efforts of the Pyramid Model framework to support young children's healthy development and prevention of challenging behavior across our mixed early childhood delivery system. We also discussed concerns around the least restrictive environment (LRE) for preschool children with disabilities and the lack of improvement nationally in this area. We explored misconceptions around childcare and regulatory requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the increased numbers of preschool-aged students eligible for special education services, the need for common language around the use of exclusionary practices in our Part B and Part C systems, and the challenges of staff recruitment and retention. The group recapped recommendations from the previous year, revisiting our hopes for this year's committee work and agreed on the following priorities: (1) advancing LRE & inclusive early childhood opportunities and (2)

supporting common language across the mixed early childhood delivery system. Our committee agreed to act as the Early Childhood Inclusion State Leadership Team to begin to address inclusive policies and practices at the state level and to invite other critical perspectives to the table.

In October, Sherri Evans, our State Early Childhood Special Education Coordinator with OSES, shared a draft of the Preschool Report for questions and feedback. The committee discussed the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center's (ECTA) [Indicators and Elements of High-Quality Inclusion](#) and focused on Indicator S1: Cross-Sector Leadership. We then engaged in a collaborative activity to begin developing a vision statement for our Early Childhood Inclusion State Leadership Team (SLT) using tools from ECTA. The group agreed to come together virtually for an ad hoc meeting in December to finalize the vision statement, identify others to include in this work, and create a schedule for additional virtual ad hoc meetings in 2025.

In January 2025, Sherri Evans provided updates from OSES. The Preschool Report was approved and would be shared with the committee following the meeting. OSES was working with South Carolina Partnerships for Inclusion to update the Early Childhood Performance Factor and additional information would be shared during the March meeting after districts were notified of the proposed changes. Sherri also shared that a memo been provided to districts from Matthew Ferguson in the Office of Instructional Supports to remind districts about the licensing requirements from the Department of Social Services (DSS) and related training hours. A survey had been offered to districts and the results were shared with DSS. DSS will contact districts with applicable next steps. Our group reviewed the final version of the vision statement and adopted it as written and then created a priority list of our work together as the Early Childhood Inclusion SLT. We also set additional ad hoc virtual meetings for February, April, May, & June and decided to invite Tammy Graham, Team Lead for early childhood at the Office of Instructional Supports, to our upcoming meetings.

During our ad hoc meeting in February, we discussed federal updates and impacts to our work. We explored the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the CEC's Division for Early Childhood (DEC) as resources for factual, evidence-based information for our field. We engaged in collaborative brainstorming and discussion to embark on our Common Language Guidance Project. We discussed the importance of using resources that already exist, such as agency documents from the organizations represented on our committee, ECTA's Indicators and Elements of High-Quality Inclusion, and the DEC Recommended Practices and glossary of terms. We also discussed the importance of defining what inclusion means and looks like in the birth-five realm and agreed upon a file sharing system to compile existing resources for further exploration.

In March, Sherri Evans provided additional updates related to the proposed changes to our state's early childhood performance factor. Moving forward, this will be calculated as a combination of our preschool environment/LRE data and the child outcome summary.

LEAs will receive this information and see their results for the new performance factor, but this will not impact determinations for this reporting year. OSES will work with South Carolina Partnerships for Inclusion to provide optional technical assistance for select districts to work through the tier 3 support process to begin to address identified areas of need. The committee reviewed our Early Childhood Inclusion SLT priorities list and discussed our plan to add resources to our shared folder for the Common Language Guidance Project. These resources included documents from national organizations, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the IDEA Data Center, the Center for Parent Information and Resources, and ECTA. Local resources from SC Child Care Early Care and Education, ABC Quality, Palmetto Pre-K, and First 5 SC were also included. The group agreed to continue working on this project during the ad hoc meetings scheduled for April-June. Kerri Kannengieser shared that her term as co-chair was ending, but she would continue to facilitate the additional meetings. Melissa Griffin volunteered to take on the co-chair position with Cathy Kovacs for the 2025-2026 year.

We recommend that the SC Department of Education continue to place stronger emphasis on implementing LRE in preschool settings and encourage an updated memo from OSES to reinforce the federal guidance (previously released on September 4, 2019 as the Least Restrictive Environment in Preschool and Continuum of Placements). Additionally, we continue to recommend adopting state policies to reduce the use of exclusionary practices, as well as support for building data systems to track suspensions and expulsions across early childhood settings.

### ***Professional Development Committee***

In August, the committee welcomed new members and provided updates about the committee's projects. OSES created seven parent training videos and would like feedback from the committee. The videos will be shared with districts, but the committee would like the videos to be shared with parents. The committee looks for ways to create advisory councils at the district level. The committee will team up with the Preschool Committee in October to tackle Indicator 5 (LRE).

In October, the committee had a fruitful discussion about statewide literacy initiatives following Senator Goldfinch's visit in August. There will be a paring down of reading screeners. LETRS training is moving into higher education. SCDE will be launching a new web site, and the new parent training videos with the partner organizations will be linked there. Parents in Greenville County Schools are pushing to create a parent advisory council.

In January, the committee welcomed a guest, Reade Bush, who is a parent of two students with disabilities and has been a member of a local Virginia school district advisory council. He shared his experiences, the benefits of the council and answered several members' questions. The committee reviewed a draft advisory letter and provided input and feedback. The committee also discussed the new US Dept of Ed guidance on inclusion

practices.

In March, the committee discussed a draft letter about creating parent advisory councils. The committee was approached about potential legislation on the Local Special Education Advisory Councils, and discussed an upcoming meeting with Pierce McNair, Director of Research for the South Carolina State House of Representatives.

### **Safe Schools Committee**

Throughout the four committee meetings, the Safe Schools Committee monitored legislation, School Resource Officer Implementation data, Handle with Care Notification System and Mental Wellness Program and the P4 grant program, Restraint Procedures revision and data from OSES on Suspension and Expulsion, Parent Involvement, Significant Disproportionate Representation in Individual Categories and percent of districts with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in specific disability categories. Multiple presentations were given. Additionally, we heard from Mindy Allen on Eco-Healthy Child Care Program focusing on prevention of lead poisoning/environment hazards in childcare facilities.

### **Transition and Self-Advocacy Committee**

In August, the committee welcomed new members and recounted what happened in the last meeting. The committee continued working on the transition flyer, which helps parents understand the different levels of high school completion.

In October and January, the committee continued working on the transition tip sheet, which helps parents understand the different levels of high school completion, which they are now calling educational opportunities. The committee focused on including QR codes and links.

In March, the committee searched for new project ideas, which included: instilling programs that would allow students to advocate for themselves, redirecting behaviors, parent-friendly cheat sheets for the South Carolina standards, and finding ways to assist students at the age of majority and beyond.

### **Accomplishments for 2024-2025:**

- This year, the Executive Council survey and consultation with the Office of Special Education Services determined that one in-person and three virtual meetings were the most productive and accessible means for participation. A survey was also completed in Spring 2025 to plan for the 2025-2026 session resulting in a continued plan for three virtual only meetings and one in-person meeting.

- Working with OSES, the Advisory Council maintained a document library. Presentations are distributed to council members via the document library so that more time can be spent discussing the material during the quarterly meetings.
- The Advisory Council continued to be more visible within the state and made more connections with other organizations that serve students with disabilities within the state.
- The Advisory Council received presentations from five technical assistance groups to impart information on how the state can access their resources.
- Members of the Advisory Council offered more Stakeholder feedback this year to OSES. Members provided feedback on the SSIP and served on the committees reviewing the SEED document.

## **X. Recommendations**

The Advisory Council has several recommendations. First, the council recommends that the Department places stronger emphasis on implementing least restrictive environment (LRE), particularly in how this applies to preschool settings (see aforementioned federal guidance) and encourage an updated memo from OSES to reinforce the federal guidance (previously released on September 4, 2019, as the Least Restrictive Environment in Preschool and Continuum of Placements). Second, we recommend adopting state policies to reduce the use of exclusionary practices, as well as support for building data systems to track suspensions and expulsions across early childhood settings.

## **Appendix A**

2024 – 2025 Full Council Meeting Calendar for the  
South Carolina Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities (ACESD)

August 25, 2024, virtual format  
October 27, 2024, in-person format  
January 26, 2025, virtual format  
March 22, 2025, virtual format

## **Appendix B**

The agenda for each ACESD meeting is shared with each member at least 24 hours prior to the meeting. You may find the 2024-25 Full Council meeting agendas on the SCDE [ACESD Agenda and Minutes](https://oses.ed.sc.gov/parents-family-community/acesd/acesd-agenda-and-minutes/) webpage located at the following url: <https://oses.ed.sc.gov/parents-family-community/acesd/acesd-agenda-and-minutes/> .

## **Appendix C**

The ACESD secretary records minutes during each full Council meeting. Those minutes are reviewed at the beginning of the following meeting, in which any corrections may be made as suggested by the body. The ACESD then votes to approve the minutes or hold for further review. The 2024-2025 Full Council meeting minutes are found on the SCDE [ACESD Agenda and Minutes](https://oses.ed.sc.gov/parents-family-community/acesd/acesd-agenda-and-minutes/) webpage located at the following url: <https://oses.ed.sc.gov/parents-family-community/acesd/acesd-agenda-and-minutes/> .

## Appendix D

### Membership listing 2024-2025 Organized by Committee

#### Preschool

Kelly Birmingham
Malerie Hartsell / Susan Luberoff
Jennifer Buster
Shana Charles
Mary Lynne Diggs / Senekita Farmer
Tiffany Eron
Heather Smith Googe
Nikki Green
Melissa Griffin
Wendy Hite
Louise Johnson
Kerri Kannengieser*
Cathy Kovacs*
Niki Outen
Teresa Rhodes
Lindsay Schmelzel

#### Professional Development

Allison Adrian
Valoree Duquette
Danshelle Guy
Susan Howard
Allison Huffstutler*
Angie Lucas
Gini Nichols
Shannon Polchow
Lindsay Porter
Anne Radue*
Mary Wood
Elizabeth Young

## Safe Schools

Susan Beck*
Valarie Bishop*
Denean Greene Rivers
Deborah Harris-Sims
Birley Wright / Kimberly Humphrey
Sadina Outlaw
Megan Schiraldi
Elizabeth Smithson
Nina Spinelli
Melanie Thrower
Meghan Trowbridge
Amber Woodward

## Transition and Self-Advocacy

Greta Bailey*
Megan Burns
Cynthia Cash-Greene
Rebekah Francis-Barnes
Jeni Garner
Troy Hall
Padgett Mozingo
Yasmin O'Keefe
Mary Stevenson
Karen Tucker
Laura Vazquez*
Margie Williamson

\*co-chairs

## **Appendix E**

The Preschool Committee of the ACESD is charged with the responsibility of identifying and studying key issues in special education and early intervention, advising, and assisting the Office of Special Education Services of the South Carolina Department of Education. The 2025 Annual Preschool Report and resulting recommendations are pursuant to Act 86 of 1993, Chapter 36 of Title 59 of the Amended Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976. [The full SCDE 2023-2024 Preschool Report can be reviewed at this link: https://www.scstatehouse.gov/reports/DeptofEducation/Preschool%20Report%202023-24%20New%20Template.pdf](https://www.scstatehouse.gov/reports/DeptofEducation/Preschool%20Report%202023-24%20New%20Template.pdf) .