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Purpose:

The Achievement for All committee was established to investigate the existing gap in reading and math achievement between students with disabilities (SWD) and their typical peers. Our goal was to make recommendations to the Office for Exceptional Children on possible next steps and considerations in improving achievement for SWD across the state. Our guiding question: What do we want the Office for Exceptional Children to know and understand about Closing the Achievement Gap?

Members:

- Jennifer Elliott (chair) - Parents of Children with Disabilities
- Carol Scally – Teachers, Ohio Federation of Teachers
- Mary Murray – Institutes of Higher Education that Prepare Special Education and Related Service Personnel (Public)
- Kate Kandel – Parents of Children with Disabilities
- Marsha Wiley – Parents of Children with Disabilities
- Loretta Coil – Parents of Children with Disabilities
- Myrrha Satow – Parents of Children with Disabilities and Public Charter Schools
- Vicki Palur – Parents of Children with Disabilities
- Laura Friedman – State Agencies Involved in Financing or Delivery of Related Services to Children with Disabilities (Ohio Department of Public Health)
- Wendy Stoica - OEC Liaison

Current Data:

- We reviewed the existing data on achievement for SWD in Ohio.
- Reading proficiency rates: 82.1% target, 54.1% for SWD
- Math proficiency rates: 72.7% target, 45.7% for SWD
- Most school districts in Ohio are not meeting the targets for proficiency rates for their SWD. Twenty-three (of 899) schools in Ohio have met these targets for their SWD. Of these, 9 are Community Schools. (Please see attached list).
- In addition, it should be noted that the majority (>80) of students with disabilities in Ohio do not have a cognitive disability.

Information Reviewed:

Our committee brought our personal experiences as parents, teachers, principals, and from higher education as we reviewed the current data and resources.

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- Our committee spent time reviewing the new common core standards and the extended standards for students with cognitive disabilities. We participated in the training modules on the OCALI website which focused on understanding the extended standards.
- Jennifer attended the Special Education Leadership Conference which focused on the theme of “Closing the Achievement Gap.” There were two talks at the conference that stuck out as being highly informative for our committee: the presentation from Solon Schools as a school district where there is no gap in achievement between typical students and SWD, and the presentation from the Data Accountability Center Pilot Project: Lessons Learned in Focusing on the Performance of Students with Disabilities (a pilot project focusing on a sample of schools, manipulating how and where students are served to see the impact on achievement of SWD).
- We invited Dale Jakab and Ann Bauer from Solon City Schools to present to the panel on how their district views education for students with disabilities and how they have achieved the results that they have.
- We followed the Solon presentation with an informative lunch with Mr. Jakab and Ms. Bauer and spent a great deal of our time discussing and processing this presentation and lunch discussion.
- We gathered data on the commonalities in complaints filed with the OEC.
- We discussed how to get information on special education training for administrators.

Solon Schools Summary:

We learned a great deal from hearing about how education is approached in a school district that has successfully taught children with disabilities. As a group, there were several things that made Solon unique which would possibly take substantial time to replicate in other districts, but which are possible with a clear long-term vision. Other strategies seemed like small changes in what some districts might be doing already, which would be easier to implement. Here are some highlights from the Solon presentation:

- Solon City Schools has had a consistency of leadership and vision at the administrative level since 1988 (Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and Coordinator of Pupil Services). □ High expectation for all students
- Their motto: Every child in every classroom every day – very inclusive setting
- Data-based decision making focusing on the learner, not on what is convenient for the adult
- Fewer paraprofessionals, more psychologists and interventionists □ All kids take the OAA tests
- **Accelerated** learning for children who are behind, so they can accomplish more than a year of work in a school year
- Teachers highly trained in RtI strategies

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- Double block learning at higher grade levels
- Periods of learning with “no new material” each day for kids to catch up
- Philosophy difference: it is easier to train a math teacher on intervention strategies than to teach an interventionist math strategies. They regularly put their best math or reading teachers in charge of their students with disabilities and train those teachers in intervention.
- The teachers are so strong that the number of kids identified with disabilities has decreased.
- Team teaching – regular education teachers give up duties to have time for collaboration with interventionists.

Discussion:

Our committee has identified several next steps based on our group discussions.

First, achievement in Ohio should be investigated both observationally and manipulatively. There is a small group of schools in Ohio where achievement levels for SWD exceed the targets (such as Solon City Schools), and these schools should be used as a data source. What is the make-up of the population of students with disabilities in each of these school districts, and how and where are they served? Are the settings inclusive or restrictive? Who is teaching these students? Why are these districts meeting targets while other districts cannot? There is a wealth of observational data waiting to be collected. There are also opportunities to take the information from these schools and apply them to a sample of districts to see how the performance of students with disabilities changes, such as in the Data Accountability Center Pilot Project (which was presented at the Special Education Leadership Conference).

Second, our discussions with Solon highlighted two areas for further investigation. Solon has had consistent leadership at the administrative level. We need to investigate how principals and administrators can shape the school climate in regards to the value placed on the education of SWD. How are these administrators trained? Does their training include instruction on how to meet the needs of SWD? Solon also highlighted the value in teacher training and the collaboration between special educators and general education teachers. We need to investigate how our general education teachers are trained to teach children with different learning styles or children who need various kinds of supports and accommodations or modifications.

Based on the information we have gathered and discussed as a committee, we feel that our committee work is not done, but that our goal of understanding achievement of SWD will require an understanding of complex areas such as administrator and teacher training. We do have several recommendations for next steps for both the Office for Exceptional Children, as well as the SAPEC panel.

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Recommendations:

Next Steps for OEC -

- Provide information to SAPEC about the Data Accountability Pilot Project
- Survey existing schools with high achievement to correlate how and where their SWD are being educated
- Provide more information to SAPEC on the panel of Deans Compact that has been formed to discuss teacher education at the university level

Next steps for SAPEC –

- Consider forming ad hoc committees to investigate the following areas :
 - Higher Education – how are our regular education and special education teachers trained at the University level? How are Special Education Administrators trained?
 - Teacher Training/Professional Development – how do our teachers receive continuing education to benefit our SWD?
 - Paraprofessional Training – how can our support staff get training to meet the needs of our SWD?
- Marsha Wiley has identified a possible future resource, who has already presented to the SAPEC Executive Committee on Administrator training – Dr. Greg Browning, Capital Partners (614-2240999).