

Rhode Island Special Education Advisory Committee

The Rhode Island Special Education Advisory Committee is an active voice in advocating that all students receive superior educational services, enabling each student to achieve optimum success throughout the school years and into the world of adulthood.

April 10, 2008

6:30pm – 8:30pm

**New England Institute of Technology
Hall of Fame Room
2500 Post Road, Warwick, RI 02886**

Meeting Minutes

Present: Deborah Ambeault, Jeffrey Aubin, Deborah Belanger, Ann Brockmann, Amy Canario, Sheila Collins, Steven DiBiasio, Roberta Emery, Ruth Feder, Ronald Martin, Dorothy McDonough, Richard Moore, Ralph Orleck, Robin Pacheco, Lillian Patterson, Mary Pendergast, Kellie Piche-Tatro, Marion Slater, Paul Stroup Jr., and Louise Tillinghast

Absent: Denise Ahern, Melissa Angell*, Gloria Bussell, Barbara

Chadwick, Kim Chouinard, Maya Colantuono, Joanne Dodd, Kat Grygiel, Lisa Guillette, Jane Morein*, Marty Morris, Walter Sage, Jane Slade*, Sharon Terzian*, and Barbara Whalen.

[*: with notice to committee]

RIDE attendees: Sally Arsenault

Visitor: Wilfred Beaudoin

Call to Order, Agenda Review, Announcements

Ralph Orleck called the meeting to order, previewed the meeting agenda, and made the following announcements:

- The May 20, 2008 RIDE Spring Leadership brochure is provided in tonight's packet**
- Barrie Grossi and Lynne Ryan are confirmed to present to RISEAC on May 15th regarding the new IEP format.**
- The Special Education Statewide Parent Survey is underway and still open. One member noted that three parents not receiving the survey last year have received them this year.**
- A copy of the Commissioner's August 24, 2007 response to the Providence Waiver Request, illustrating the conditions for waiver approval, is provided in tonight's packet as indicated by Ken Swanson at the March meeting.**

- **The annual RISEAC Dinner meeting is on schedule for June 19th from 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. and is confirmed to be held at the Cowesett Inn in Warwick.**
- **Kudos to the four cosponsors of today's conference on Transition, attended earlier today by Ralph. Keynote by Curtis Richards from the National Collaborative on Workforce Development and Disabilities, was very interesting. Information from the conference can be viewed at www.ncwd-youth.info**
- **Jane Keane, former liaison from the Office for Diverse Learners to RISEAC, sends her greetings.**

Approval of Minutes

The March 20, 2008 Meeting Minutes were reviewed and accepted.

The following discussion ensued regarding whether there should be a provision to indicate “excused absence” in the minutes to reflect absence of active members who contact the Chair or the list serve to inform the committee that they will be unable to attend a meeting due to illness or other extenuating circumstances. There is no provision in the current RISEAC By-Laws for “excused” absences. The by-laws indicate that members with three consecutive absences may be terminated by majority vote, although this provision has never been exercised. Factors such as illness, for example, would be a consideration. The Committee is growing, and there may be a need to reconsider the by-laws addressing attendance.

The Committee voted and agreed that all future minutes will reflect, using an asterisk, those members who contacted the chair or committee in advance of a meeting to indicate that they cannot attend.

Director's Report

Ken Swanson, Director of the Office for Diverse Learners, is attending the Northeast Regional Resource Center's semi-annual conference and is unable to attend tonight's meeting. The Director's Report was forwarded to the committee through Sally Arsenault, who presented the report to the Committee. This report is attached as Addendum to the minutes.

Old Business

Membership Committee

Sheila Collins, Chair of the Membership Committee, which includes Steve DiBiasio, Robin Pacheco, Louise Tillinghast, and Amy Canario, presented the slate of candidates for consideration as new members of RISEAC.

A great group of applicants has come forward. Louise expressed that it was a privilege to meet the candidates. Twelve applications were

received, with two withdrawn. Sheila distributed and reviewed the list of names, briefly highlighting each individual's qualifications. The pool of parent applicants is weighted somewhat toward children on the autism spectrum, but it was recognized that this is a growing population. A brief discussion of the candidates ensued. The importance of RISEAC members representing the committee only when authorized by RISEAC was discussed in light of selecting new members.

A member suggested that the committee create a procedure for providing feedback to the membership Committee regarding new member applicants, prior to their presentation to the full committee. Another possibility is to go into executive session at the committee meeting to discuss the slate of members, in respect of confidentiality. Members were invited to bring a written proposal to the committee.

Current committee composition continues to reflect more than 50% of parent members. It was expressed that the committee continue to ensure the majority of parents, and that parent representatives currently have children or young adults with disabilities in the eligible age range of 3-26 years. Three members will be leaving the committee this year. To confirm whether any other members' terms may be expiring under the current by-laws, the current membership list was passed along for members to confirm the date that they joined the committee.

With Lillian's term expiring, there will be a need for a member representing higher education. Members discussed some strategies for pursuing individuals at URI, PC, and CCRI.

Members will share further insights at the next meeting, and vote on the slate of new members using a written ballot process. Sally will prepare a ballot format. Ralph thanked the Membership Committee for its work.

RISEAC Subcommittees

Copies of the following action plans for those workgroups whose work is still ongoing were distributed: Performance-Based Graduation Requirements (PBGR); New IEP format; Unmet Needs. Ralph reviewed each of these and asked the groups to convene, confirm work accomplished, and determine next steps for each plan. Groups met for twenty minutes.

The subcommittees reported out to the full Committee about their next steps as follows:

- PBGR: Action Step: Research with David Sienko regarding the current status of the Commissioner's Review Process and District Designations. Responsible member: Paul Stroup. Timeline: October**

2008.

- **IEP: Action Step: Get parent input (already ongoing) within RIPIN and questions from RISEAC on list serve, and forward to Barrie and Lynn to respond to at the next opportunity/event. Responsible member: Deb Belanger. Timeline: May 2008.**

- **Unmet Needs:**

- Transportation: Action Step: Shift focus from statewide transportation plan (appears to be on hold) to focus on children's experience riding on the bus and implications for advising training for bus drivers and bus monitors. Timeline: September.**

- Mental Health: Action Steps: (a) Take a look at teacher certification requirements; (b) Review dual certifications that some colleges have. Consider ways to advise teacher preparation or in-service; consider advising events, such as a Leadership Conference, and ask teens to present.**

It was noted that the Department of Corrections did something similar, and that 15% of its population experiences mental health issues, beginning in the school years.

Timeline: September 2008

Ensuring discussion included the suggestion to work with the Special Education Advisory Network (SEAN) on these issues and on issues in general, since it has a wider reach and more capacity.

Regarding higher education and teacher preparation to better address students' mental health needs, the concern centers on

general education teachers with limited special education background. This has implications for Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies. It was noted that, at RIC, the general education teacher preparation program includes just one course on special education. There is an option to pursue dual certification. At PC, teachers take courses in both as part of dual certification. At URI, a dual program has been created and approved and is now under consideration by the Commissioner of Higher Education.

Ralph thanked the workgroups and asked them to create an update of their work plans.

Physical Restraint in Schools

The group discussed and voted to agree to invite Marvin Abney to a future RISEAC meeting, to inform RISEAC of the provisions in the Physical Restraint Regulations, report on the status of district level restraint policies, describe RIDE's report collection process regarding restraint incident data, and answer questions.

Dot McDonough will draft an invitational letter and distribute via the RISEAC list serve for member review and input. RISEAC will then finalize the letter and forward the invitation to Mr. Abney.

New Business

Slate of RISEAC Officers

Before presentation of the slate of officers, the Committee considered a recommendation and voted to amend its by-laws to allow a RISEAC Officer whose term expires while in office to finish the term.

Sheila Collins presented the following slate of officers nominated for the upcoming term:

Chair: Ralph Orleck

Vice Chair: Paul Stroup

Corresponding Secretary: Sharon Terzian

Recording Secretary: Several people approached, but none yet recruited. As of July, the Recording Secretary will assume responsibility for taking minutes and presenting the draft minutes to the committee.

Ralph nominated Mary Pendergast for Recording Secretary.

Further nominations were invited; none were offered.

The committee voted to affirm the four nominated members to serve in their respective offices, to begin on July 1, 2008.

Medicaid Bill

There was a brief discussion of the Medicaid bill disseminated via

the RISEAC list serve. There will be additional research regarding this correspondence to determine whether committee action should be considered.

Meetings for the Upcoming Year

New members will need to be made aware of the following meetings that they will be expected to attend:

New Member Orientation in August; one Saturday strategic planning session in September; and monthly meetings from 6:30pm – 8:30 pm from October through May, usually on the 3rd Thursday except for school vacation months.

Agendas

To assist the Recording Secretary in her new role, it was suggested that having a list of topics that will be covered in the Director's Report forwarded to Mary P. from Ken or brought with him to the meetings would be very helpful to taking the meeting minutes. Steve DiBiasco expressed thanks to Sally for providing the minutes this year and noted that these have been very complete.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

RISEAC's next meeting is scheduled on April 10, 2008.

Attachment

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Attachment

Rhode Island Special Education Advisory Committee

**Office for Diverse Learners Director's Report
April 10, 2008**

Greetings from Northampton,

**My apologies for not being there in person, but I am attending the
Northeast Regional Resource Center's semi-annual**

meeting/conference. This is an opportunity for SEA directors to meet and discuss issues that are relevant to each of us and be able to share strategies, successes, and "man, did we ever mess up that one" moments.....

Our agenda speaks to concerns we are wrestling with nationally, regionally and locally. Home Schooling, the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard/Center, Suspensions/Expulsions, Charter Schools, Monitoring, Autism and Early Childhood Education Environments are all agenda items for the next few days. We are also fortunate to be sharing time with hearing officers, mediators, and legal eagles from the northeast as well.

On the RI home front, I wanted to share some activities/events that have taken place or are about to.

RIDE has conducted four regional overviews in two locations; Southern and East Bay. All sessions have been well attended and have afforded us the opportunity to clarify and provide guidance. Questions from parents and educators continue to form our thinking and message. I am continually impressed with the depth of understanding and inquiry that individuals possess. While challenging at times, it is clear that the decision makers in our educational community have a firm grasp of the new regulations, their nuances, potential pitfalls and spirit. These sessions have proved to be an educational experience for all involved. That said,

there have been a few changes throughout the presentations as we refine our communication. One aspect that has received much deserved discussion is the issue of parental signatures. Rhode Island has an acculturized notion that a parent must sign each and every IEP prior to delivery of service. Federal language has always stated that parental signature is required only in the following situations:

- Initial Consent for Evaluation
- Consent for Re-evaluation
- Initial Consent for Services

As we have rolled out this message, several individuals, including RISEAC's own Ralph Orleck, posed questions regarding the clarity of the power point presentations. We have made those adjustments and thank those who pointed out these and other issues.

IEP training is rolling out as well. Technical assistance is available at several levels; overviews for all interested parties, district specific training and parent group training. These opportunities are made available through RIDE, RIPIN and RITAP.

I was happy to provide opening remarks at this year's College Fair at PC held Saturday, March 29th. As always, the regional transition coordinators provided leadership in facilitating the day. It is rewarding to see students taking the initiative of preparing themselves for post secondary educational opportunities.

We have recently received initial feedback from OSEP regarding our State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report submitted in February 2008. Under the leadership of Susan Wood, Office of

Diverse Learners staff are providing the requested information in a very short time frame. I can readily assure everyone that Rhode Island's data becomes increasingly accurate and informative with each submission.

One aspect of the SPP that RISEAC has expressed an interest in at the last meeting is the Parent Survey, which is a statewide measure of schools' efforts to involve parents of children with disabilities, as one means of improving services. Last month, members of RISEAC reported initial sightings of our marketing campaign, yet surveys themselves had not yet arrived. I can report that surveys are out and being returned. We hope to actualize our targets each year for increased parental participation as well as for an increasing percentage reporting school efforts at or above the state standard. As we did last year, ODL is recording any returned mail due to delivery problems and/or inaccurate data from LEAs. We will be issuing reports to individual districts once the survey season is complete.

Regarding Secondary Regulations, RIDE directors have been meeting frequently to address the public's concerns about the draft regulations, including the High School Diploma system. As with the regulations governing students with disabilities, we are assisting in the compilation and analysis of testimony and input. I can assure RISEAC that concerns have been heard and appropriate modifications are being developed for Regents' consideration.

I will close for now.... being in a college town again for the first time in many years allows me to reflect on my own experience. I'm happy to

**report that Northampton continues to be overrun by coffee shops,
bookstores, natural food markets....**

Yours truly,

Ken