

Special Education Advisory Council

Meeting was called to order at 5:03 pm.

Members in attendance: Natalie Tillman-London, Carmen Overton, Cynthia Chesterfield, Valentina Rideaux, Chundra Steele-Woods, Pamela White, and April Harmon.

The meeting started with Secretary Carmen Overton reading the previous meeting minutes and the current agenda.

Summary of Transcript:

The meeting started at approximately 5:30 PM, with introductions of new parent liaisons: Ms. Dana Webb, Ms. Shana Johnson, Mr. Adam Menendez, and Mrs. Jamie Price. It was noted that Mr. Menendez would be added as a committee member to assist with interpretation.

Dr. Coles provided insights regarding parental engagement and school district coverage. Dr. Robert Garcia presented a video on the importance of inclusion in the education system. Dr. Coates shared that out of 13 growth targets, 11 had been met, with further details to be provided in a future meeting. The meeting also included a Q&A session and testimonies, notably from a parent named Mr. Wilmer. The meeting adjourned at 7:30 PM.

The agenda for the current meeting included:

- Opening by Natalie Tillman-London and Carmen Overton.
- Presentations by Dr. Robert Garcia and Ms. Kimberly Turner on the Jesse program and student transitions.
- Ms. Coleta Anderson discussing extended school year information.
- Ms. Cynthia Chesterfield discussing "Families Helping Families."
- A Q&A session followed by meeting closure and planning for the next meeting.

Kimberly Turner discussed the importance of early transition planning for students, highlighting a new Independent Living Skills Center—a real house where students practice life skills such as cooking, cleaning, and other essential tasks. This facility, initially a custodian's residence, has been remodeled and furnished for educational use. Community-based middle and high school classes visit the house regularly to engage in structured learning activities related to independent living.

Additional Summary:

The discussion continued with the introduction of a new garden project, funded and set to be constructed with raised beds in the back of the facility. The speaker expressed pride in the Life Skills Center and its ongoing improvements.

Another major topic covered was the expansion of pre-employment transition services, mandated by federal law. The school district has been working with a service provider for four years,

improving the process for students. Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) oversees the program, which helps students with financial planning, interviewing, and self-advocacy. Currently, 160 students across nine schools receive these services.

A key part of the program is the **Work-Based Learning Experience (WBLE)**, which includes classroom instruction followed by paid, hands-on work opportunities. Once students are authorized, they can participate in paid work experiences either during the school year or in the summer. Students are placed in roles such as office assistants at their schools, earning \$11 per hour.

The payroll system for the WBLE program has also evolved. Previously, the East Baton Rouge (EBR) school district handled payroll, requiring students to follow standard hiring procedures like fingerprinting and onboarding. Now, a third-party vendor under "Opportunity Now" manages payroll, simplifying the process.

Additional Summary:

The **Opportunity Now** program streamlines the hiring process for students, eliminating the need for district-specific onboarding requirements. However, if necessary, the district hiring process can still be used, though it takes longer.

The goal is for all students to receive **pre-employment transition services** through Opportunity Now and be prepared for job placements. A key initiative to support this is the **Student Diversity Job Fair** on April 1st. This fair is organized in collaboration with youth development instructors, Opportunity Now, and teachers. Selected students must meet specific criteria, including passing grades and authorization from LRS, before participating.

At the job fair, students will undergo **interview preparation**, create resumes and cover letters, and participate in interviews. A scoring system will determine their readiness. If selected, administrators will evaluate whether positions can be created for them at their schools. If schools cannot accommodate them, students may be placed in other departments, such as ESS, extended-year programs, or district offices.

This initiative has grown significantly, now offering **year-round employment opportunities**—in spring, fall, and summer. Available positions include **aide, assistant, food service technician, graphic arts assistant, maintenance, office assistant, receptionist, and transportation internship**.

Currently, **20 students are employed in the program** for the spring semester, and last summer, 20 students participated. The **JESSI program**, which encompasses these opportunities, is open to **all students**.

Additional Summary:

The **JESSI program** is **inclusive and available to all students**, including those in **community-based programs** and students with significant disabilities. If students **do not meet the standard job criteria**, efforts are made to **customize job opportunities** to fit their needs.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) & Job Coaching Support

For the first time this year, **vocational rehabilitation (VR) services** were applied for **while students are still in school**, allowing **students with significant disabilities** to gain work experience with the support of a **job coach**. Currently, four students are participating in this program across different schools.

Success Stories & Outcomes

The **pre-employment and work-based learning experiences** are leading to **better student outcomes**, with students transitioning successfully to **higher education and employment**. One notable success story is a student who participated in these services and is now excelling at **Baton Rouge Community College (BRCC)**.

Program Details & Eligibility

- **Age Requirement:** Students can begin receiving **pre-employment services at age 16** but must be **17 to participate in paid work-based learning experiences**.
- **Service Duration:**
 - Typically, students receive **one year of classroom instruction** before transitioning to work-based learning.
 - Work-based learning experiences last **240 hours each**, and students can **complete up to three experiences** (e.g., summer after 11th grade, fall/spring of 12th grade, and possibly another summer).
- **Eligibility:**
 - The program is **designed for students with disabilities**.
 - Students with an **IEP (Individualized Education Program)** are usually **easily authorized** for services.
 - Required paperwork must be **properly completed** for authorization.
- **Availability:**
 - The program is available in **all high schools**, so students can participate regardless of the school they attend.

Would you like more information on how to get started or specific schools offering the program?

Key Announcements & Events

1. **Expansion of JESSI Program**
 - Currently in **nine** high schools.
 - Goal: Expand to **every** high school this year.

- Meetings are being held to finalize participation with **all schools except one** (pending discussion).
- 2. **Student Diversity Job Fair – April 1st**
 - Organized event for students to **interview for job opportunities**.
 - Transportation provided; **buses will pick up students, bring them to the interview site, and return them to school**.
 - Students **must have permission forms** to participate.
- 3. **Transition Fair – March 29th (Next Saturday)**
 - **Brings together service providers, agencies, and organizations** that assist students **before and after** high school graduation.
 - Helps families **plan for transition** beyond high school.
 - Includes services for students with **significant disabilities and high-functioning students**.
 - Highlights:
 - **Career training programs** at BRCC & LSU (e.g., "Program for Successful Employment").
 - **Community Integrated Study programs** that help students gain skills while living on campus.
 - **Transportation services** available for individuals with disabilities.
 - **Ray J College** now offers a **cosmetology program** and will provide **complimentary haircuts** at the event.
- 4. **New Collaborations & Expansions**
 - Working with the **Department of Workforce Development** to expand **work opportunities for students with disabilities** next year.
 - Additional programs and services will be announced soon.
- 5. **Extended School Year (ESY) Program**
 - Presentation by **Coleta Anderson** on ESY services for eligible students.

Key Takeaways

- The district is making **major efforts** to provide **job training, career pathways, and transition services** for students with disabilities.
- Multiple **upcoming events** (Job Fair & Transition Fair) offer **great opportunities** for students and parents to learn more.
- If interested, parents should **contact Kimberly Turner** for further details.

Would you like more details on any of these events or programs?

Key Takeaways from the Presentations

Extended School Year (ESY) Program – Presented by Coleta Anderson

- ESY services are an **extension of the school year** for students with an **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)**.
- Designed for students who experience **regression and difficulty with skill recovery** after breaks.

- Decisions on eligibility are made at the **school level** based on **progress, regression, and recruitment data**.
- **Approximately 300 students** have qualified so far this year.
- **Program Dates: June 9 – July 17** (Monday – Thursday, 4 hours per day).
- **Transportation & Meals** are provided, but **not financial compensation**.
- **Parents should reach out** to Ms. Anderson via email at CAAnderson19@EBRSchools.org for eligibility questions.

Families Helping Families – Presented by Ms. Chesterfield

- A **resource and support organization** for individuals with exceptional needs and their families.
- Collaborates with **schools, parents, and regional services** to **help resolve concerns**.
- Offers **education, training, and workshops** to help parents **navigate special education services**.
- **Workshops cover:**
 - Navigating **grief and loss** for students and families.
 - Accessing **Louisiana Department of Education** resources.
 - Training on **IEP rights, advocacy, and available support services**.
- **Office Location: 2356 Dursilla Lane**
- Encourages parents to visit, ask questions, and use available resources.

Action Steps for Parents

- ☒ **Confirm if your child qualifies for ESY** and reach out to Ms. Anderson with any questions.
- ☒ **Attend the training workshops** offered by Families Helping Families.
- ☒ **Utilize available resources** to navigate special education services and advocacy.

Would you like additional details on any of these topics? 😊

Key Takeaways from Additional Presentations

Families Helping Families – Additional Resources & Events

- **Trauma-Informed Care Training:** Provided by the **Office of Behavioral Health**, covering support strategies for families dealing with trauma.
- **IEP vs. 504 Training (March 24):** Helps parents understand the differences between an **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** and a **504 Plan**.
- **Family Involvement in Mental Health Treatment Training:** A resource for families navigating mental health support.
- **Facebook Live Support Group:** A space for parents of children with exceptionalities to connect and share experiences.
- **Annual 5K Run/Walk (April 26):** A fundraiser for individuals with **autism**.

Louisiana Department of Education Policy Updates

- **Special Education Policy Training:** Led by **Chassity**, LDOE's **Special Education Ombudsman**, to discuss **new policies and dispute resolution options**.
- This training will cover **updates in special education policies** that may impact students and families.

Louisiana Association for Advocacy & Action (LaCAN)

- **Advocacy for Individuals with Disabilities** at the **state legislature**.
- **Yellow Shirt Days (March 25 & 26):** Events at the **State Capitol** where advocates can meet with legislators about disability-related concerns.
- **Legislative Roundtable (April 10, 1-3 PM, Virtual):** Seeking **testimonies from families** about disability services.
- **Advocacy Focus for 2025:**
 - **Restoring funding for Families Helping Families** programs.
 - **Protecting disability programs** from potential budget cuts.
- **How to Get Involved:**
 - Visit **LAD.org** for action alerts and updates.
 - Sign up for **membership** to receive updates and advocacy opportunities.

Action Steps for Parents & Advocates

- ☒ Attend the **IEP vs. 504 training on March 24** to learn about education plans.
- ☒ Join the **policy update session** with LDOE's Special Education Ombudsman.
- ☒ **Participate in Yellow Shirt Days (March 25 & 26)** at the Capitol or submit concerns online.
- ☒ Sign up for **advocacy alerts** on **LAD.org** to stay informed.
- ☒ **Testify at the Legislative Roundtable (April 10, Virtual)** to share experiences.

Would you like more details on any of these events or assistance with advocacy? 😊

Q&A Session Summary

Eligibility & Age Restrictions for Services

- Services **start at age 6** in Louisiana.
- Individuals can receive support **as long as they are in school**.
- Most students **age out at 21**, but in some cases, they can stay until **22**.

Next Steps for Policy & Training Meetings

- More **meeting dates** will be added, and updates will be shared as soon as they are available.
- The **LDOE policy update training on April 2** will provide additional insight into changes in **special education policies**.

Advocacy & Yellow Shirt Days

- **Yellow Shirts represent advocacy for children with disabilities.**
- Attendees can receive a **yellow shirt** to wear at the **State Capitol or other advocacy events.**
- **Ways to participate:**
 - Attend **in-person advocacy events.**
 - Send **emails to legislators** expressing concerns.
 - Sign up for **membership (free)** to receive updates.

Upcoming Autism & Disability Awareness Events

- **Autism Acceptance Month (April):**
 - **Magnolia Rose Foundation Color Run (April 5, Baker City Park).**
 - **Families Helping Families 5K Run/Walk (April 26).**
 - More events will be shared via email.
- **Down Syndrome Day (March 21) – Wear blue & yellow** in support.

Final Notes & Contact Information

- **Chandra Steele**, Program Facilitator for Autism, will be at various events and is available via email for inquiries.
- Flyers and contact information for all programs are available for attendees.

Would you like me to draft an email or flyer summarizing these updates for distribution? 😊

It sounds like there was a great turnout for the meeting, and a lot of important updates were shared! Here's a **recap of key takeaways** from the discussion:

Upcoming Meetings & Locations

- More **meeting dates** will be added to the calendar to keep parents informed.
- Meetings will be **held in different areas across EBR** to make them more accessible.
- A **larger venue** will be sought to accommodate more attendees.

Summer Program & Parent Involvement

- The **CA Committee Council** is planning **expanded summer programs** and activities for children.
- The **LDOE Parent Survey** will be available **in April** to collect feedback on district services.
- Parents will receive a **letter with a special identifier number** to complete the survey.

Contacts for Special Services & Programs

- **ESY (Extended School Year):** Coleta Anderson (CAnderson@EBRSchools.org)

- **Transition Services: Kimberly Turner (KTurner@EBRSchools.org)**
- **Autism Support: Chandra Steele (Autism@EBRSchools.org)**
- **Family Helping Families: Cynthia Chesterfield**
- **Executive Director: Dr. Janet Harris**
- **Director: Dr. Roney Coates**
- **Special Education & Transition Support: Dr. Robert Garcia**

Acknowledgment of Parent Engagement

- **Region 2's largest CA parent meeting turnout** was recognized!
- High engagement levels show the **strong support and advocacy** from parents in the community.

Would you like a **formatted flyer or email draft** summarizing this for distribution? Let me know how I can assist further! 😊

Meeting adjourned at 6:17 p.m.