

The BSE Communicator

A Quarterly Update from the PA Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education

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Welcome to the 2007-08 School Year!

John J. Tommasini, Director

As the 2007-08 school year begins, let me be one of the first to wish you a great year. We continue to be blessed with great successes across the state in special education. During the coming school year I will continue to promote achieving the 20 Indicators of Success and improving educational results for all students. This issue of *The BSE Communicator* highlights updates at the BSE, a summer conference event and some positive news regarding special education in Pennsylvania. Have a great school year!

Pennsylvania Receives High Marks on Special Education Report Card We received some great news this summer regarding special education and improving student achievement. Pennsylvania is making notable strides in its special education efforts and is outperforming many other states, according to newly released findings from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. The findings show that Pennsylvania is one of only nine states to fully implement federal requirements for educating students with disabilities.

The federal findings summarize how each state has implemented a portion of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which is meant to target specialized programs to students with disabilities between the ages of three and 21. Pennsylvania was among just nine states determined to be "meeting requirements" in this area. The remaining states were determined to be in need of assistance or intervention. Either status could result in sanctions or the loss of federal aid. The U.S. Department of Education evaluated multiple factors used for special education students including: graduation rates, dropout rates, performance on statewide assessments and accessibility to early childhood and special education.

Staff Updates

The BSE said "farewell" to Special Education Advisors Ann Kernan, head of the State Task Force for the Right to Education, and Jane Sullivan, who was instrumental in BSE's success in meeting the IDEA requirements for the State Performance Plan. Their work on behalf of Pennsylvania's children is immeasurable.

There are leadership changes at all three Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) offices. Our best wishes and appreciation for dedication to increasing student achievement throughout Pennsylvania go to three PaTTAN administrators: Kerri McCarthy, assistant director, PaTTAN, Harrisburg, 35 years of service; Kate DiLullo, supervisor/assistant director, PaTTAN, King of Prussia and Dr. Ellen Romett, director, PaTTAN, Pittsburgh, with 37 years of service in education upon her retirement at the end of October.

James Palmiero, assistant superintendent of Woodland Hills School District, will succeed Dr. Romett as the director at PaTTAN, Pittsburgh. Monica Maiese, a former special education supervisor at Montgomery County I.U., is the recently appointed assistant director at PaTTAN, King of Prussia. Dr. Victor Rodriguez-Diaz is the new assistant director at PaTTAN, Harrisburg where he was an education consultant and previously served as a supervisor in the School District of the City of York.

You're the only one who can make a difference. Whatever your dream, go for it!

Ervin "Magic" Johnson

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Edward G. Rendell, Governor

Department of Education Gerald L. Zahorchak, D.Ed., Secretary

Office of Elementary and Secondary Education Diane Castelbuono, Deputy Secretary

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10th Annual National Autism Conference

The summer conference schedule (highlighted in the last newsletter) represents one of the most important aspects of the BSE - professional development. The 10th annual National Autism Conference was held July 30 – August 3, 2007. There were 2,915 pre-registered participants, family members and walk-in participants and 290 webinar participants. In order to support family participation in the conference, a Children's Institute which provides an on-site, structured and fun environment for children with autism and their siblings was provided free of charge to families attending the conference. A total of 157 speakers provided 99 educational sessions. Over the past two years the Department of Public Welfare has sponsored behavioral health scholarships and sessions for participants.

We congratulate and thank PaTTAN Harrisburg Education Consultant Cathy Scutta. This successful national event is a tribute to her leadership and hard work and the commitment of the PaTTAN staff to supporting student success. We also commend the staff, families, volunteers and agencies that support services for children with autism and helped to make the conference a success, for the 10th year in a row.

Questions & Answers

1 Will the BSE be able to provide financial support to assist school districts with ensuring that teachers are highly qualified, and that they meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements?

The BSE received some great news recently – we were awarded a \$6.94 million grant, \$1.388 million annually for five years, for the State Personnel Development Grant. It is targeted to specific activities related to special education personnel for educational interpreters, paraeducators, school psychologists, special education leaders and highly qualified secondary special education teachers with the long term outcomes targeted at improving achievement scores and graduation rates for students with disabilities. The BSE, parents, higher education, PaTTAN and intermediate units will all play a role in the delivery of staff development activities to begin October 1.

2 What is the status of Chapter 14 and how soon will the recommendations be adopted and approved by the State Board of Education?

The State Board may take action on adopting the final Chapter 14 regulations at their November or January meeting. The anticipated effective date of the Chapter 14 regulations to be in place is July 1, 2008.

3 Can you highlight the changes in the Complaint Management System? What is the number of complaints filed and resolved from previous years? What is the purpose of adding the Acknowledgment Letter?

One of the changes during the 2006-07 school year was the attachment of the Report of Complaint Resolution to the Acknowledgement letter. We heard from parents and school districts that they do not know whom to talk to about complaints. This action gave the complainants and districts the opportunity to resolve complaints between themselves earlier than the 60-day deadline. The acknowledgement letter allows both parties to meet and discuss before the complaint report and encourages working together to resolve the miscommunication as soon as possible. This collaboration on problem solving reduced the formal complaints about 25 percent from the 2005-06 school year (441) to the 2006-07 school year (331).

4 Is the BSE soliciting for successful evidence-based practices from classrooms and programs in Pennsylvania?

Yes! We would like to share and highlight programs. Many teaching tools and innovative programs are already in place that will work successfully for a student in another school, but no one will know about them until they are shared! Consider sending in a short description of an evidence-based success story that demonstrates improved student performance, including supporting data, to mdavis@pattan.net.