

Summary minutes are draft until approved at the June 10 meeting.

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
STATE ADVISORY PANEL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN
SUMMARY

March 11, 2026

Attendance:

Amy Smith, Ashley Barlow, Cora McNabb, Eileen Hoover, Emily Fox, Heather McConnell, Jaclyn Hawley, Jeni Lyn Ward Bolander, Jonathan Talmadge Curry, Lacheena Carothers, Laura Tipton, Layla Frazier, Tiffanie Clark, Zachary Stumbo

Members Absent:

Alexandria Wright, Allisson Amshoff, Amber Hamm, Jeffrey F. Coles, Jessica Moore

Summary:

Agenda Item: Welcome

Presenter: Gretta Hylton, Ed.D., Associate Commissioner and State Director of Special Education, Office of Special Education and Early Learning (OSEEL)

Summary of Discussion:

- **Mission and Vision:** Dr. Hylton explained that the mission of OSEEL is to improve educational outcomes for diverse and early learners through support, technical assistance, training, coaching and guidance, emphasizing the importance of compliance, access and opportunity as foundational pillars.
- **Organizational Structure:** The office is structured with a core staff handling policy, data, finance and communications, and includes five divisions or units such as IDEA Implementation and Preschool, IDEA Monitoring and Results, State Schools, Preschool Unit, and Transition Education Unit, each led by designated directors or interim leaders.
- **Funding and Staffing:** OSEEL receives substantial IDEA federal funds, with the majority allocated to local education agencies and a portion used for administrative costs; the office employs over 200 staff, including those at the Kentucky School for the Blind and Kentucky School for the Deaf, with about 70 Frankfort-based staff primarily funded by IDEA dollars.
- **Technical Assistance and Regional Support:** Discretionary funds are used to support technical assistance providers and regional outreach centers, such as Special Education Regional Technical Assistance Centers and Early Childhood Regional Training Centers, which serve as direct support to local school districts and preschools.

- Accomplishments and Monitoring: Kentucky has received a 'meets requirements' determination from the U.S. Department of Education for 16 consecutive years, and recent federal monitoring found no corrective actions required, with only a minor noncompliance issue quickly resolved.

Agenda Item: Legislative Update

Presenter: Melody Cooper, OSEEL Policy Advisor

Summary of Discussion:

Melody Cooper delivered a comprehensive legislative update, detailing the status and content of key education-related bills in the Kentucky General Assembly, with additional input from Gretta Hylton and responses to member questions.

- Melody Cooper described the legislative process, distinguishing between statutes (KRS), administrative regulations (KAR), and non-regulatory guidance, and encouraged members to use the General Assembly website to track bills and their amendments.
- Key House Bills: Highlighted bills included House Bill 1 (establishing a scholarship tax credit fund), House Bill 67 (traceable communications cleanup), House Bill 253 (language arts instruction reform), House Bill 257 (assessment and accountability system changes), House Bill 307 (post-secondary admissions program), House Bill 383 (IEP requirements for military families), House Bill 389 (dyslexia and dysgraphia policy requirements), House Bill 562 (alternate high school diploma), House Bill 621 (class size limits for exceptional children), and House Bill 882 (disciplinary removals).
- Key Senate Bills: Senate bills discussed included Senate Bill 3 (school district financial transparency), Senate Bill 4 (principal leadership program), Senate Bill 101 (discipline reporting requirements), Senate Bill 111 (recess requirements), Senate Bill 181 (traceable communication cleanup), Senate Bill 191 (kindergarten readiness incentive), Senate Bill 318 (limits on digital instruction), Senate Bill 332 (surveillance in special education classrooms), and Senate Bill 152 (changes to site-based decision making councils).

Feedback:

Members asked for clarification on House Bill 621 regarding class size numbers and on House Bill 389 regarding inclusion of dyscalculia and the process for diagnosing dyslexia and dysgraphia; Cooper committed to follow up with more detailed information for members.

Agenda Item: SAPEC Purpose and Duties

Presenter: John Copenhaver, Program Director, Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education (TAESE) at Utah State University

Summary of Discussion:

John Copenhaver led an in-depth orientation for SAPEC members, covering the panel's federal- and state-mandated purpose, membership requirements, advisory functions, meeting procedures, and best practices.

- Panel Purpose and Legal Basis: John Copenhaver explained that SAPEC's purpose is to provide policy guidance and advice to the Kentucky Department of Education, specifically the Office of Special Education and Early Learning, on issues related to special education and related services for children with disabilities, as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Membership Structure and Representation: The panel's membership must include parents of children with disabilities, individuals with disabilities, teachers, administrators, representatives from higher education, child welfare, private and charter schools, business and transition services, corrections, and homeless education, with a majority being parents or individuals with disabilities; appointments are typically for three-year terms, renewable once.
- Duties and Functions: SAPEC's five core duties include advising on unmet needs, commenting on proposed rules and regulations, advising on data evaluation and reporting, advising on corrective action plans for federal monitoring findings, and advising on coordination of services, with an additional duty related to collaboration with corrections.
- Meeting Procedures and Executive Committee Roles: Meetings are open to the public, require a quorum, and follow open meeting statutes; the executive committee, including the chair and vice chair, leads meetings and may form ad hoc committees as needed to address specific issues.
- Advisory Versus Advocacy Role: Copenhaver distinguished between advisory (providing guidance, recommendations, and suggestions) and advocacy (actively supporting or arguing for a position), emphasizing that SAPEC's influence comes from its advisory capacity, which is highly valued at both state and federal levels.
- Best Practices: John Copenhaver shared best practices for effective panels, such as setting priorities based on data, maintaining strong communication with the state director, and ensuring diverse representation.

Agenda Item: Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes and Administrative Actions

Presenter:

Tiffanie Clark

Summary of Discussion:

- Panel approved the minutes from the previous meeting.
- Approval of Minutes: Laura Tipton moved to approve the previous meeting minutes; Cora McNabb seconded.
- The next meeting was scheduled for June 10, 2026.