

2023-2024 Annual Report of the New Mexico IDEA Advisory Panel

Submitted by Kaity Ellis, Chairperson
On April 25, 2024

Introduction:

The New Mexico IDEA Advisory Panel has been tirelessly working to improve educational opportunities for students with disabilities in our state. As my term as Chairperson ends this year, I am proud to present a high-level overview of our accomplishments, challenges, and ongoing initiatives.

Key Highlights:

Autism Committee Surveys:

The Autism Committee conducted a comprehensive survey for school personnel and parents statewide. These surveys provided invaluable feedback on the awareness and utilization of services tailored to students with autism. Based on the data collected, we have recommended to the Department of Education (PED) that all staff members receive comprehensive training on Individualized Education Program (IEP) considerations for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Enhanced Resource Dissemination:

The panel identified the need for enhanced mechanisms to disseminate resources to families to ensure that families are well-informed about available services for students with autism. Our efforts are focused on addressing high-priority needs across a broader spectrum of students to enhance their educational experiences.

Reintroduction of Orientation and Mobility Services:

The panel responded to student requests and is actively working towards reintroducing orientation and mobility services in schools. These services are essential for students with disabilities and their independence and success.

Promotion of Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs):

We are advocating for the use of Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) to support student learning effectively. Our goal is to shift the focus of BIPs from punitive punishment plans to proactive strategies that empower students and foster a positive learning environment.

Collaborative Efforts:

Our collaboration with team members at PED, including Dr. Cage, Dr. Jenkins, and Mr. Lozano, has been instrumental in addressing critical issues and promoting positive change within the panel. Their valuable insights and expertise have contributed significantly to our efforts to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

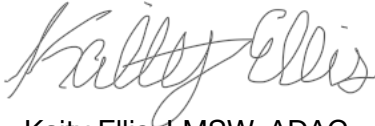
Vice Chair's Initiative:

Vice Chair Jennifer Donelli has led an ad hoc work group tasked with revising the Bylaws to enhance communication with the PED. This initiative aims to strengthen the panel's capacity for effective representation and informed decision-making.

Conclusion:

As my term as Chairperson comes to a close, I am confident in the continued dedication and commitment of the New Mexico IDEA Advisory Panel to advocate for students with disabilities and foster positive change in our educational system. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve in this role and look forward to seeing the ongoing impact of this collective effort in the years to come with the impactful leaders throughout New Mexico.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kaity Ellis". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Kaity Ellis, LMSW, ADAC
Chairperson, New Mexico IDEA Advisory Panel

High Needs Committee Recommendations 2023-24

Remove any abbreviations of special education to “SPED” from the Department of Public Education verbiage as soon as possible.

“SPED” is being used as a derogatory insult and leads to bullying in schools. While PED cannot prevent its use by everyone, it can **set an example of removing the use of a word** from all of its communications that has become increasingly weaponized against the students it serves. We hope that PED will thoughtfully consider the mental health and well-being of some of its most vulnerable students in considering this recommendation.

While we realize the state has little control over all state or district-level documents, we recommend that **PED issue a memo encouraging the removal of “ SPED” from documents and communications at all levels.**

Bill of rights for students with visual impairments and deaf and hard of hearing and their families.

The bill of rights for students with visual impairments and deaf and hard of hearing and their families should be **codified statewide**, explained and given to every parent, and **noted as received on the PWN.**

[TheBillofRightsforAllChildrenwithVisualImpairment-2.docx](#)

https://handsandvoices.org/pdf/dc_billofrights.pdf

https://handsandvoices.org/articles/education/law/dcbr_revisited.html

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ss/dh/positionstmnt.asp>

We recommend that a **drop-down be added to the IEP** template acknowledging that these Bills of Rights have been given to parents.

Expanded Core Curriculum

A **technical assistance manual for the Expanded Core Curriculum** should be available for all visually impaired students, not just the guidance for braille users.

In addition to the student’s bill of rights for visually impaired students, the expanded core curriculum should be referenced explicitly **in state law.**

To serve all students with visual impairments during the IEP process, the Expanded Core Curriculum should be supported/**added to the IEP template**, not just the braille addendum.

TSVI, O&M, and TOD salary tier/stipend

While there are significant shortages in special education staff in New Mexico, there is a more extreme national shortage of specialized educators for visually impaired and deaf/hard of hearing students.

PED and the state schools already offer scholarships for these certifications. Yet, there continues to be a shortage, resulting in a denial of FAPE to higher-needs students, which is beyond individual school districts' control to remedy. Therefore, to solve this crisis, it is incumbent upon PED to step in with additional systemic measures to solve these staff shortages. Scholarships for training in these positions are currently being offered, but salary post-certification may only be minimally increased. Current measures have not proven to be effective in filling the continued vacancies.

If an experienced or more highly educated professional has already topped out their salary in the current three-tier model, they are not motivated to receive this training. We recommend creating a **statewide additional, higher salary tier or an ongoing stipend**, or at least exploring a future cost model, as an option for these more specialized and in-demand professionals.

We support looking into additional stipends or a separate salary tier for special education staff in general. However, the shortages affecting this high-needs population are of specific concern to the High Needs Committee.

Adaptive PE

We recommend the state reinstate the endorsement for adaptive PE and look into additional **stipends or a separate salary tier** for this endorsement.

We request that these recommendations be added to the Special Education Panel annual report.