Action Alert #19
BESE to Discuss Special Education Monitoring Audit

June 3, 2024

The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's (BESE) Academic Goals and Instructional Improvement Committee meets next Tuesday, June 11th, at 9 AM. The committee plans to discuss a recent legislative audit focused on special education monitoring (Agenda).

Last month, the Legislative Auditor's office released the second in a series of audits evaluating the Louisiana Department of Education's (LDOE) oversight of students with disabilities who receive special education services. This audit focused on Special Education Monitoring and the improvements LDOE needs to make to

- Ensure all students with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE), and
- All school systems follow the requirements of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and state law.

The Risk-Based Monitoring of Special Education Services audit can be viewed HERE. The committee will also receive an update on special education key performance indicators. For more information about the audit findings and performance indicators, refer to the Additional Information section below.

Do you have ideas and recommendations on how LDOE can better monitor special education services? Are you concerned that the number of students receiving a traditional diploma has declined? Do you have ideas on how LDOE can improve stakeholder engagement? If so, the committee and your BESE member needs to hear from you!

How to Take Action
Email the Chair and members of the Academic Goals and Instructional Improvement Committee before the committee meets on Tuesday, June 11th.
- Conrad Appel – Chair   Conrad.Appel@la.gov
- Dr. Judy Armstrong   Judy.Armstrong@la.gov
- Stacey Melerine   Stacey.Melerine@la.gov

Email or call your BESE member and the at-large BESE members by Tuesday, June 11th.
- Click here for BESE members' contact information.
- Don't know who your BESE member is? Click here for a map of the BESE districts.

Attend Yellow Shirt Day and share your thoughts, ideas and recommendations with the committee.
- Tuesday, June 11th at 9 AM
- Claiborne Building – Louisiana Purchase Room 1-100
  1201 North Third St., Baton Rouge, LA 70802

When emailing your comments, please include your name, address, phone number, email address and the issue you are addressing (Item 3.2). Don't forget to thank members for supporting the needs and interests of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

If you need help with this alert or attending Yellow Shirt Day, contact your LaCAN Leader. The meetings will be live streamed on BESE's website and their YouTube Channel if you are unable to attend in person.

Additional Information

On May 20, 2024, the Legislative Auditor released the Risk-Based Monitoring of Special Education Services audit , which evaluates the LDOE's oversight of students with disabilities who receive special education services. Below is a brief summary of the findings:

- LDOE did not conduct a desk or on-site review for 43 (43.0%) of 100 school systems for at least seven years (academic years 2015-16 through 2021-22) to ensure certain fundamental rights of students with disabilities required by IDEA are being protected. Instead of LDOE completing a desk or on-site review, LDOE required all but two of these school systems to complete a self-assessment.
- LDOE decreased the number of employees dedicated to special education from fiscal years 2012 through 2019, and in 2015 LDOE entered into a Consent Judgment in Orleans Parish. Both actions may have contributed to LDOE's inability to conduct onsite and desk reviews in a timely manner and provide support to school systems.
- LDOE's process to select students during a desk or on-site review does not ensure it monitors all applicable federal and state law requirements listed in its monitoring protocol.
- LDOE has not developed policies and procedures or guidance for school systems to follow regarding informal removals, including how to document informal removals.
- LDOE is not following federal regulations when calculating significant disproportionality relating to discipline.

Page seven of the audit provides a brief summary of the findings and recommendations.

An update on special education key performance indicators will also be shared. The report indicates students with disabilities are making gains, especially in high school English Language Arts (ELA) and Math. The state has also seen improvements with the number of certified special education teachers employed. Unfortunately, there are a couple of areas of concern:

- The rate of students with disabilities graduating with a traditional high school diploma dropped from approximately 75% in the 21-22 school year to approximately 61% in the 22-23 school year. This 14% drop is concerning especially when the April Dunn Act is available to offer students with disabilities an alternative pathway to a diploma.
- Louisiana still falls short of the federal target as it relates to stakeholder engagement.

Confirm Your Action

- Email your LaCAN Leader after you take action
- Why confirm your action? This helps the Council know how effective we are reaching you with important information and engaging members across our state in advocacy for systems change.

Tips & Tools for Advocacy

Looking for tips and tools to help you in your advocacy? Check out the Council's Advocacy 101 page. You can also find tips for:

- Writing/emailing your legislators
- Calling your legislators
- Writing your story

Contact Us

LaCAN is an initiative of the LA Developmental Disabilities Council. If there are any questions about the information in this email, contact the Council by replying to this email, or calling the toll free number listed below:

phone: 1-800-450-8108
email: info@laddc.org
website: www.lacanadvocates.org
facebook: www.facebook.com/LaDDCouncil
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