



**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
STATE ADVISORY PANEL
ON SPECIAL EDUCATION**

2024-25 ANNUAL REPORT



Dear Mayor Bowser, Chairman Mendelson, Deputy Mayor Kihn, Superintendent Mitchell, and esteemed education leaders:

On behalf of the State Advisory Panel on Special Education (SAPSE), I am proud to submit our 2024–25 annual report. This year, the panel deepened its commitment to elevating the voices of families and community members, reviewing policy and practice through a lens of equity and inclusion, and working in partnership with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) to improve outcomes for students with disabilities across the District.

Throughout the year, SAPSE served as a vital conduit between families, community stakeholders, and government leaders. We reviewed critical data trends and offered timely feedback on policy developments and programmatic guidance. We appreciated the opportunity to weigh in on OSSE’s ongoing efforts to reimagine high school graduation requirements and look forward to continuing dialogue to ensure that all students—including those with the most significant needs—graduate prepared for life beyond high school. The panel also spent significant time reviewing indicators within the Annual Performance Report (APR) and discussing the systems and structures needed to increase parent engagement, reduce dropout rates, and improve transition outcomes.

We are grateful to OSSE staff for their ongoing collaboration. As we look to the year ahead, SAPSE remains committed to building a more inclusive, transparent, and responsive education system—one that reflects the values and aspirations of all District families.

Sincerely,

Julie Camerata

Chair, DC SAPSE

TABLE of CONTENTS

04

**What Is
SAPSE?**

04

**SAPSE Activities:
2024-25 School Year**

07

**Meet SAPSE:
2024-25 School Year**

What is SAPSE?

What? The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that each state operate a statewide advisory panel. In accordance with this law, the District of Columbia has convened a State Advisory Panel on Special Education (SAPSE). The purpose of SAPSE is to advise the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) on unmet needs of students with disabilities, including the development of evaluations, reports, and corrective action plans in response to federal monitoring, and implementing policies and procedures to coordinate services for students with disabilities.

Why? The District of Columbia SAPSE's mission is to provide advice from the perspective of parents of students with disabilities to OSSE.

Who? A majority of SAPSE's members are parents whose children have disabilities. There are also representatives from various District agencies and stakeholder groups. All members are appointed by the Mayor.

When? SAPSE holds four public meetings per year. Meetings are usually held virtually.

Get involved! All of our meetings are public meetings, and we especially value the participation of parents of children with disabilities and members of the community who themselves have disabilities. If you would like to attend a meeting, [visit our website](#) to see when the next one is happening!

SAPSE Activities: 2024-25 School Year

Throughout the 2024–25 school year, SAPSE held quarterly public meetings to fulfill its mission of advising OSSE on the provision of services for students with disabilities in the District of Columbia. Each meeting served as a platform for parents, community members, and agency representatives to review policy developments, analyze state and local data, and provide meaningful feedback on the implementation of special education programs. The panel engaged deeply with OSSE staff to discuss emerging challenges and opportunities; share family and community perspectives; and offer recommendations that center equity, inclusion, and improved outcomes for all students with disabilities. The following summaries reflect the key discussions and takeaways from each meeting held during the 2024–25 school year.

November 2024 Meeting Summary

SAPSE kicked off the 2024–25 school year by reviewing a series of newly released guidance documents from OSSE aimed at strengthening family engagement and clarifying key procedures in the special education process. These included the updated *Special Education Process Handbook*, new guidance on *Parent Participation and Engagement in the Special Education Process*, and guidance on determining transportation eligibility and vehicle accommodations as related services. The panel also reviewed two key policy bulletins—one on informal removals of students with disabilities and another on timely referrals for initial evaluations—both aligning with recent federal guidance. Members provided feedback on a draft early childhood transition policy, noting the need for clearer articulation of local education agency (LEA) responsibilities and stages of enrollment during the transition process.

The panel was also briefed on OSSE’s efforts to improve communication with LEAs through new newsletters and webinars, as well as the release of the Special Education Performance Report (SEPR) for 2024. An overview of the “Reimagining Graduation” initiative highlighted OSSE’s release of a new graduate profile and upcoming stakeholder engagement. Members also discussed delays in OSSE’s Special Programs parent portal rollout due to staffing challenges. Additionally, SAPSE reviewed proposed DC Council legislation—the Advancing Equity in Special Education Protocols Amendment Act—which includes provisions to protect feeder school continuity and regulate class ratios in self-contained settings. The meeting concluded with a shared desire for

deeper partnership with OSSE and interest in developing a standalone SAPSE website to better inform and engage families.

January 2025 Meeting Summary

At the January meeting, the panel turned its attention to the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR), examining federal indicators used to measure the District’s progress in serving students with disabilities. OSSE walked members through updates on key indicators, including graduation and dropout rates, which continue to reflect post-pandemic disruptions. The panel noted expected trends, such as decreased graduation rates and increased dropout rates, while also highlighting concerning data on post-school outcomes and secondary transition compliance.

Discussions centered on the interpretation of these data and the implications for LEA support. The panel urged OSSE to consider more differentiated strategies tailored to LEA-specific needs, particularly when addressing high dropout rates. Members emphasized the importance of including student voices in efforts to improve retention and instructional quality.

OSSE also introduced guidance on several emerging issues, such as effective Child Find practices, criteria for assigning dedicated aides, and best practices for conducting difficult conversations with families. The panel emphasized the need for tools that are not only compliant but family-friendly and supportive of strong school-family relationships.

April 2025 Meeting Summary

In April, SAPSE reviewed OSSE’s updated strategic plan with a particular focus on Priority Area 3: strengthening expectations and accountability for serving students with disabilities. OSSE shared its efforts to publish user-friendly family engagement tools, expand LEA capacity to analyze SEPR data, and improve the use of IDEA funds through targeted technical assistance.

Panel members explored the challenges faced by LEAs in implementing inclusive practices, particularly around expanding least restrictive environment (LRE) continuums. Members highlighted the importance of both compliance and quality—especially in the context of postsecondary readiness. The conversation touched on OSSE’s findings from the DC Dual Enrollment Consortium, which revealed that many students with disabilities arrive at institutions of higher education underprepared, pointing to a misalignment between high school programming and college expectations.

The panel also examined OSSE’s ongoing secondary transition work, noting the US Department of Education’s national push to strengthen these services. SAPSE members emphasized the need for fidelity in service delivery, particularly in ensuring that students play an active role in planning for their futures. The meeting concluded with a review of draft guidance documents and a renewed focus on improving systems for meaningful feedback and data sharing.

May 2025 Meeting Summary

SAPSE’s final meeting of the year centered on proposed changes to the District’s high school graduation

requirements. OSSE presented draft revisions informed by its Reimagining High School Graduation Requirements initiative, including the introduction of new advising checkpoints; senior capstone projects; and potential diploma endorsements for students participating in programs such as career and technical education (CTE), Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), or dual enrollment.

Panel members appreciated the thoughtful design of these changes and voiced strong interest in ensuring that students with disabilities—especially those with the most complex needs—are not left behind. Members encouraged OSSE to provide clear, inclusive pathways that reflect both academic and functional postsecondary readiness.

The panel also provided feedback on draft LEA guidance documents and reiterated the need for improved alignment between policy goals and on-the-ground implementation. As the year concluded, SAPSE reaffirmed its commitment to advocating for accessible, high-quality education for all students with disabilities in the District.

For more information on SAPSE’s activities prior to January 2025, including meeting minutes, please see the [SAPSE website](#).

Meet SAPSE: 2024-25 School Year

After several years without a quorum, SAPSE was excited to welcome new members to the panel this year, strengthening our capacity to represent diverse voices and perspectives. We remain deeply grateful to the long-serving members whose continued commitment and expertise have provided essential continuity and leadership.

Meet SAPSE: 2024-25 School Year

Member Name	Organization/Seat Designation
Julie Camerata, Chair	Vocational, community, or business organization representative
Brandi Baker	Teacher
Courtney Davis	Public member
Cecelia Ewan	Parent member
Faith Gibson-Hubbard	Parent member
Terrence Gunthrope	Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services (DYRS) designee
Rochanda Hiligh-Thomas	Parent member
Nicole Lee-Mwandha	OSSE designee, Subtitle B of Title VII of the McKinney-Vento (MKV) Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11431 et. seq.)
Sylvia Morrison	Higher education representative, preparer of special education and related service personnel
Joelle Myers	Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) designee
Christopher Nace	Representative of private schools and public charter schools
Michelle Parrish	Parent member
Antonia Reason	Department of Corrections (DOC) designee
Willina Robson	Department of Disability Services (DDS) designee
Ryan Tauriainen	Public member
Roxanne Williams	Parent member
Margie Yeager	Administrator of programs for children with disabilities

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WE ARE
WASHINGTON
GOVERNMENT OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DC MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR