



OFFICE OF THE STATE
SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

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

Public Meeting 4
Thursday, December 18, 2025
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Meeting conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams.

[Register for the meeting here](#)

or use the following information:

Meeting ID: 250 385 854 611 32

Passcode: Lo2Ra7kt

AGENDA

Attendance: Tikeya Milburn, Cecelia Ewan, Michelle Parish, Julie Camerata, Faith Gibson-Hubbard, Ryan Tauriainen, Joelle Myers, Margie Yeager, Nicole Lee-Mwandha, Rochanda Hiligh-Thomas, Vida Rangel, Divya Pogaku. OSSE: Jasmine Fleming

Time	Topic
6:00 – 6:05 p.m. (5 mins)	Call to Order/Welcome Review of Norms Vote on Agenda Vote on October 2025 Meeting Minutes <i>Faith Gibson-Hubbard – SAPSE Chair</i> - Panel convened for the fourth public meeting of the year. - The panel voted on and approved proposed norms and October meeting minutes.
6:05 – 6:15 p.m. (10 mins)	Swearing in <i>Vida Rangel, Mayor’s Office of Talent and Appointments (MOTA)</i> New members of SAPSE were formally sworn in during the meeting. The process included an affirmation of commitment to uphold federal and local regulations, maintain confidentiality, and actively advise OSSE on unmet needs and policy development for students with disabilities.
6:15 – 7:15 p.m. (60 mins)	OSSE 2026-30 Strategic Plan

	<i>OSSE/ DeliverEd</i> • Overview of challenges in meeting the needs of students with disabilities - o Resource and Service Gaps: There is a significant gap between the needs of students with disabilities and the resources available to support them. Many students are not being connected to Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) programs despite established targets. Schools frequently lack adequate staffing, including nurses and related service providers, which limits students' ability to access a free and appropriate public education. Additionally, compensatory services often do not timely or sufficiently address the initial missed service, further widening service gaps. - o Barriers for Foster Care Youth: Students in foster care face unique challenges in accessing special education services. The child find process is often slow and complicated by limited advocacy and school staff's insufficient understanding of legal requirements. Frequent placement changes among foster youth exacerbate these delays, resulting in untimely eligibility determinations and Individualized Education Program (IEP) implementation. - o Systemic Challenges: Broader systemic issues contribute to persistent inequities. Many general and special education staff members are inadequately prepared to provide services that drive improvements in educational outcomes. While the District has numerous resources, coordination among agencies and service providers remains weak, leading to fragmented support. The system prioritizes compliance over quality, emphasizing procedural adherence rather than student-centered outcomes. This compliance-driven approach often overshadows efforts to improve instructional quality and perpetuates service gaps, leaving many students underserved.
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	- o Accountability in Special Education: Compliance vs. Quality ▪ There is an ongoing debate regarding whether accountability in special education should remain focused on compliance or shift toward quality. While compliance ensures that schools meet legal requirements, it often overshadows the more critical question: <i>Are students receiving the support they need to succeed?</i> Panel members suggest stronger compliance monitoring by OSSE while others argue for reducing compliance-driven oversight in favor of prioritizing quality, measuring outcomes and effectiveness rather than procedural adherence. ▪ Families are often told that schools are obligated to provide an “appropriate” education, not the best possible one. In practice, this standard frequently translates into meeting minimum requirements rather than delivering meaningful results for students. LEAs, supported by OSSE, should aim for an accountability framework that prioritizes quality alongside compliance, raising expectations so that services strive for excellence, even if perfection is not always attainable. The DC education sector should ensure that students receive robust, effective services that meet their needs and promote meaningful outcomes. - o Data and Accountability Concerns: LEAs are increasingly taking the Special Education Performance Report (SEPR) seriously, for example in the charter sector, where PCSB and charter leaders reference compliance metrics during renewals and impose conditions on schools that
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	fail to meet standards, using OSSE’s reports as a basis. OSSE should revisit the outcomes section of SEPR. Current metrics do not always reflect true student outcomes and, in some cases, are not useful for driving improvement. Schools can rank highly in SEPR categories while their students with disabilities perform poorly on SEPR benchmarks signaling an acceptance of low performance, perpetuating inequities. Raising expectations and refining performance metrics could create stronger incentives for schools to prioritize student progress. ▪ It is unacceptable for students to receive repeated progress reports and IEP updates showing no improvement. Accountability should ensure that schools cannot allow stagnation and that metrics truly measure growth and quality, not just compliance. • Overview of recommendations for OSSE to improve outcomes for students with disabilities: ○ Leadership: Explore areas where OSSE could take a stronger leadership role, provide more focused support, or build capacity. ○ Accessibility to Dispute Resolution Options: Improve accessibility and awareness of OSSE’s formal complaint process for violations of IDEA. Many families and individuals outside of education do not know this option exists or how to navigate it, and the current process is not user-friendly. Making this process more visible, clear, and accessible could strengthen OSSE’s role in accountability and support for families. ○ Improving the IEP Process for Families ▪ Need for Accessible Information: Parents and guardians often enter the IEP process without a clear understanding of their rights or available resources. Many families do not know where to turn if they have a complaint or concern, nor do they fully
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	understand their procedural safeguards under IDEA. To address this, schools should be required to provide clear, accessible literature outlining parental and student rights at the start of the IEP process and annually during IEP reviews. This information should include updated informal and formal dispute resolution options in a user-friendly format, rather than relying on lengthy procedural documents or inaccessible URLs. Providing hard copies and simplified materials would help families navigate the process and advocate effectively for their children. ▪ Reducing Complexity and Conflict: The current entry point into special education often feels adversarial and overwhelming for families. Parents are typically handed lengthy procedural safeguard documents and prior written notices without clear guidance, leaving them confused and unsupported. This lack of accessibility and empathy fosters a culture of defensiveness, where schools prioritize compliance to prepare for due process rather than collaboration to support students. Families should not need legal representation to secure appropriate services. The process should begin with clarity and compassion: welcoming families, explaining rights in plain language, and providing a simple roadmap for next steps. Offering an updated, user-friendly pamphlet at the start of the IEP process could transform the experience, reduce conflict, and shift the system away from compliance-driven fear toward partnership and quality outcomes. - o Data Transparency: OSSE currently offers guidance around compliance-based issues, but there is an opportunity to expand its role to focus
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	on quality and outcomes for students with disabilities. OSSE holds a significant amount of data that is not widely shared or clearly utilized. Panel members noted that stakeholders have raised concerns about transparency and the need for OSSE to leverage this data more effectively to drive improvements in special education. In recent testimony before the DC Council, it was suggested that OSSE revisit how it uses and reports data, ensuring that metrics reflect meaningful outcomes for students rather than just compliance indicators. - o Building Relationships: OSSE should embrace innovation but recognize that it does not need to do everything itself. Instead, it can create opportunities for others to lead and implement solutions. The Special Education Enhancement Fund (SEEF) grant allowed organizations to build demonstration classrooms that became citywide models of excellence. This illustrates the power of OSSE acting as a catalyst rather than the sole implementer. OSSE needs to improve collaboration and communication with stakeholders. Despite having strong intentions and talented staff, OSSE often operates in a silo, which limits progress. DC is a resource-rich city, yet those resources are not leveraged effectively because organizations frequently compete rather than collaborate. - o Transportation: OSSE provides general guidance, but differences in LEA implementation lead to inconsistent quality and access. Many DCPS schools lack the capacity to serve all students locally, forcing families into long-distance bussing, which disrupts family life and negatively impacts learning. OSSE should collaborate with DCPS to ensure neighborhood schools have adequate resources and staffing, reducing reliance on transportation.
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	- o Professional Learning: There is a gap in professional development for special education teachers, especially novices. While strong investments have been made in literacy training, similar resources for special education, such as guidance on writing IEPs, conducting meetings, and implementing services, are limited or not widely publicized. If these resources exist, they should be made more accessible; if not, they need to be developed to ensure teachers are equipped to support students effectively. • Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback around the Strategic Plan: - o The first round of stakeholder engagement included surveys sent to parents, teachers, staff, and special education coordinators, as well as conversations with several organizations focused on special education. A second round of engagement is planned for January and February to provide feedback on identified priorities and gather input on specific initiatives. It was recommended to engage the ICC (Interagency Coordinating Council) as part of this process. - o Stakeholders expressed frustration that despite years of conversations, little has changed for students, and OSSE continues to operate in ways that yield the same results. OSSE should rethink its approach and move beyond incremental adjustments toward bold, systemic changes that make a tangible difference for children and families. - o The current state of special education in DC reflects a systemic crisis, not isolated issues. Families across all backgrounds face the same battles, navigating complex processes, inadequate resources, and inequitable access, unless they can afford private education or homeschooling. This is not about disparities alone; it is a universal failure for families relying on public education. Stakeholders are calling for OSSE to raise
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	expectations and lead transformational change so that every child receives high-quality services without families having to fight for basic rights.
7:15 – 7:25 p.m. (10 mins)	Annual Performance Report (APR) Introduction <i>Jasmine Fleming – OSSE</i> Panel received an overview of the IDEA Part B State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR).
7:25 – 7:55 p.m. (30 mins)	Public Comment- N/A
7:55 – 8:00 p.m. (5 mins)	Debrief and Planning for Upcoming Meetings <i>Faith Gibson-Hubbard</i> January Meeting Summary - Upcoming SBOE Engagement: - Only one virtual engagement occurred so far; additional in-person sessions are planned. - Goal: SBOE should focus on practical studies during the meeting, not the entire scope of their work. - Meeting Publicity: - Members encouraged to share invites personally with school leaders, parents, and networks. - Future Topics for Discussion: - Practical Studies: Continue as a priority topic. - AI Integration in IEP Process: Explore how AI tools could support IEP creation and empower parents and schools. - Parent Experience: Focus on improving family engagement and making the IEP process feel collaborative and supportive. - Consider additional topics for future meetings and identify key stakeholders to engage (e.g., ICC, task force members).

This meeting is governed by the Open Meetings Act. Please address any questions or complaints arising under this meeting to the Office of Open Government at opengovoffice@dc.gov.

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

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