

# **DC'S STATE ADVISORY PANEL ON SPECIAL EDUCATION**

Annual Report 2018-2019



LaToria Brent, SAPSE Vice Chair, facilitates Town Hall discussion

Fellow Washingtonians,

On June 30, I completed my first full year as chair of DC's State Advisory Panel on Special Education (SAPSE). It has been an extreme honor to serve alongside parents whose desire is but for the city to fulfill its responsibility and offer a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities. Unfortunately, we are a long way from getting there. While we are bolstered by the inclusion of special education as a pillar of the OSSE's strategic plan, we know that intentions and plans alone won't get our children where they need and deserve to be. To that end, we hope the OSSE considers and acts upon the concrete, small but meaningful recommendations included in this report. We recognize that these recommendations are in no way the answer to the tremendous challenges facing our system as it strives for improvement. But, we believe that by taking them seriously, the OSSE will take the first steps toward repairing trust between parents of students with disabilities and the city that has failed them.

I would like to commend the OSSE on its efforts to inform and accept input from the SAPSE this year. I would also like to reaffirm that the SAPSE stands ready and willing to partner with and support the OSSE as it embarks upon the work of improving outcomes for students with disabilities, our children.

Yours in service,

**Julie Camerata**, Chair  
State Advisory Panel on Special Education

#### SUBMITTED TO:

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Washington, DC 20004

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## WHAT IS THE SAPSE?

**What?** The District of Columbia's State Advisory Panel on Special Education's (the "SAPSE") mission is to provide advice from the perspective of parents of students with disabilities to the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE).

**Who?** The SAPSE is made up of a majority of parents whose children have disabilities. There are also representatives from various District agencies and stakeholder groups. All members are appointed by the Mayor.

**When?** The SAPSE holds four public meetings per year. Meetings are usually held at OSSE offices.

**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! [www.bit.ly/DCSAPSE](http://www.bit.ly/DCSAPSE)



During SAPSE's Annual Retreat on September 20<sup>th</sup>, the panel selected its theme for the year: Parent Empowerment! This work focused on two key areas generated by parents at the Town Hall - Parents' Rights and Parent Survey. Two subcommittees were formed, one for each key area.

## SAPSE TOWN HALL | SEPTEMBER 8, 2018

In dynamic rounds of table discussions, DC parents of students with disabilities and who receive special education services attended a 4-hour Town Hall on September 8<sup>th</sup>, and shared their thoughts, ideas, concerns and questions with members of the SAPSE. Parents moved in three rounds to various tables in the room and discussed these key questions:

- Round 1:**
- Think back to a moment when you felt really positive about your child's school experience.
  - When things are working, what is happening that's helping it to work? (at the school, with staff, with you, your child, etc.)

- Round 2:**
- What's not working?
  - Why are things not working?

- Round 3:** Dream It! Describe your ideal scenario for special education in DC.

In order to prioritize the work for the 2018-2019 school year, the SAPSE focused specifically on the "what is not working" component of the Town Hall discussions. Parents' comments, questions and concerns fell into three main "buckets": communication; parent support; quality.

COMMUNICATION	PARENT SUPPORT	QUALITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• need transparency</li><li>• access to Special Education Data System (SEDS)</li><li>• access to Service Trackers</li><li>• school hasn't created an environment for parents to connect with other parents</li><li>• parent survey ineffective, not evaluative</li><li>• language access</li><li>• need for clear language in documents and verbally during meetings</li><li>• need to be informed in a timely manner</li><li>• need for schools to treat parents with respect</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• need for "parents guide" to help break down barriers with understanding the laws (Free Appropriate Public Education-FAPE and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act-IDEA)</li><li>• more information about parent advocates and advocacy organizations</li><li>• ambiguity around special education process and knowing your rights</li><li>• transportation</li><li>• need for support in meetings</li><li>• understanding IDEA, policies, rights</li><li>• need for clear language in documents and verbally during meetings</li><li>• need for schools to treat parents with respect</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• lack of expertise at all levels: administration, teachers, related service providers (need training, need knowledge of disabilities categories)</li><li>• inadequate staffing</li><li>• data needs to be objectively collected and shared with parents (esp. Parent survey)</li><li>• hostile attorneys/central office (even when school might be supportive)</li><li>• disconnect between central office, DCPS and what is happening at schools</li><li>• not enough progress (IEP, PARCC scores, graduation rates)</li><li>• students need to be centered and listened to</li></ul>

The primary goal of the Town Hall was to inform SAPSE's work for SY 18-19. During SAPSE's Annual Retreat on September 20th, the panel selected its theme for the year: Parent Empowerment! This work focused on two key areas generated by parents at the Town Hall - Parents' Rights and Parent Survey. Two subcommittees were formed, one for each key area.

## COLLABORATION WITH THE OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION ON BEHALF OF DISTRICT RESIDENTS

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After launching their work at the Town Hall, the SAPSE met in person and virtually for six additional meetings over the course of the academic year. In addition to the Committee Work (see Section IV), the SAPSE focused on communication with various representatives of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) in order to provide feedback and advise the panel on items pertinent to all parents and community stakeholders throughout the district.

This work centered around the following areas this year.

1. The State Annual Performance Report (past years' reports can be found at: [www.bit.ly/2XqTR1K](http://www.bit.ly/2XqTR1K))
  - a. The SAPSE participated in a presentation and question/answer session with OSSE representatives in December of 2018.
  - b. Following this presentation, the SAPSE generated and submitted a document to OSSE containing 32 specific questions that were relevant and important to our parents and community stakeholders throughout the District.
  - c. OSSE returned to the SAPSE meeting in February with answers to our questions and follow-up on our feedback.
2. Significant Disproportionality ([www.bit.ly/309jJAG](http://www.bit.ly/309jJAG))
  - a. OSSE representatives met with the SAPSE three times over the school year to discuss the new policies and timelines. Along with this work, OSSE updated the SAPSE representatives on specific data and equations used in the analysis as well as the reporting of equity within our District.
  - b. At the March meeting, SAPSE members requested a one-pager that could be distributed to the general public.
3. The OSSE DC Schools Report Card ([www.bit.ly/2FT5Zma](http://www.bit.ly/2FT5Zma))
  - a. OSSE representatives presented details on the overall concept as well as walked us through the flow of the newly designed and released online Schools Report Card.
  - b. SAPSE members asked questions and provided feedback on the accessibility and usability of the online Report Card.
  - c. OSSE representatives communicated with the SAPSE over the course of the year on Report Card progress, to include information about focus groups for teachers and staff of DC schools. SAPSE members disseminated this information to their networks.
4. Chapter 30 of the DC Municipal Regulations (DCMR) ([www.bit.ly/31ZGSHA](http://www.bit.ly/31ZGSHA))
  - a. In April, OSSE representatives advised the panel that in the next month or two, they expect to announce Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for draft proposed revisions for Chapter 30 (Special Education) in Title 5-E (Original Title 5 – Education) of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations (DCMR) (5-E DCMR §E-3000-3099).
  - b. SAPSE members were provided the opportunity to advise OSSE about the logistics and formatting of feedback sessions, one of which will be geared towards parents of children with disabilities throughout the District.
    - i. SAPSE suggested that OSSE hold feedback sessions in the community, rather than at the central OSSE office in NW DC.
    - ii. SAPSE also reminded the OSSE team that summer is a difficult time to generate large amounts of participation throughout our District; providing childcare would certainly help to increase attendance.
    - iii. When OSSE presented drafts of Section Summaries to the panel, suggestions were made around further editing these to include less legal and technical language. In addition, the SAPSE members advised OSSE to include visual supports - such as charts and graphs - in order to increase clarity for parents.





## SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

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### PARENT'S RIGHTS

#### I. Goal

The goal of the Parent's Rights committee was to investigate current OSSE resources for Parent's Rights and provide 3 concrete suggestions to OSSE on: a) how to make what exists better (i.e parent friendly language) b) what's missing and c) how to communicate to parents so they know what's there.

#### II. Key Accomplishments

Over the course of the year, this committee used local and national resources to accomplish the following:

- Reviewed websites from OSSE and 3 other states (Maryland, Massachusetts and Virginia).
- Identified areas for OSSE to improve resources for families - parent's rights.
- Discussed ideas for the best, most efficient ways to share info with parents.

#### III. Data Connection

- [Rights of Parents of Students with Disabilities: IDEA Part B Notice of Procedural Safeguards](#)
- [Special Education Parent Information Brochure.PDF](#)
- [Parent's Guide to Understanding Your IEP Rights and Responsibilities in Maryland](#)

#### IV. Recommendations

1. SAPSE recommends that OSSE improve its ability to partner with educational organizations and agencies (Advocates for Justice and Education, Office of the Student Advocate, DC Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education, DC Special Education Cooperative, Children's Law Center, all DC agencies serving kids with special needs, etc.) in the District of Columbia who currently serve families and inform them when new educational tools, documents, etc. are developed and released.
2. SAPSE recommends that OSSE improve the ways in which it communicates with parents of students with disabilities. Specifically, OSSE should:
  - a. Create a stand-alone website for parents of students with disabilities. The site should include resources, videos, and information on topics ranging from early intervention through secondary transition and should use multiple modalities to share information, such as video modules blogs and social media (in multiple languages) that are parent friendly;
  - b. Ensure that all materials generated for parents are accessible and parent-friendly. Specifically, SAPSE would like for OSSE to prioritize the following documents:
    - iv. The "Procedural Safeguards" and the "Special Education Parent Information Brochure". SAPSE recommends that OSSE take the Procedural Safeguards document and create 2-3 versions taking into account length and readability.
    - v. SAPSE also recommends that OSSE revise the Special Education Parent Information Brochure to include more in-depth information.
3. OSSE should ensure that all Local Education Authorities ("LEAs" or schools) are transparent with parents, community members on what tools are used to educate our disability community.



***Parents need to better understand the language of special education in order to access their children's rights.*** – SAPSE Parent



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## PARENT SURVEY

### I. Goals

The goal of this committee was to review DC's Parent Survey (<http://bit.ly/309slau>) and provide three concrete suggestions to OSSE on: a) how to improve the survey ; b) how to increase parent participation; and c) use of survey results to drive improvement in special education for DC families.

### II. Key Accomplishments/Highlights

Collectively, the committee reviewed the online survey as it is written and evaluated its content. The results are as follows:

- Verified parent survey return rate as 10%
- Confirmed survey results are not publicly shared
- Reviewed research compilation of parent survey methodology and qualitative data from other states

### III. Data Connection

Two forms of data that connected our parent survey are OSSE's parent survey liaison and independent research compiled by committee members.

### IV. Recommendations

1. Utilize best practices to increase participation and access to the survey; e.g. modeling other states with a higher return rate, utilizing social media, etc.
2. OSSE should make it more transparent that individual responses will be kept confidential and add language to ensure confidentiality for parents - especially that their answers will NOT be shared with their schools;
3. OSSE should explain to parents how the responses will be used and what outcomes the survey responses yielded (e.g., how are they using the responses to measure satisfaction with the program, what are their outcomes, etc.);
4. OSSE should share the survey results with the public and use them to recommend "tangible" changes in services/systems;
5. OSSE should provide parents with the opportunity to contribute to the development of the survey questions, and ensure that all the questions utilize parent-friendly language, and parents are permitted to provide further comments on their responses



***As a parent, it is important to get authentic feedback that is inclusive to inform OSSE to make better choices to serve individuals with disabilities in the District."***

***- SAPSE Parent***

# MEET THE **SAPSE**



**An Almquist**  
Parent



**Latoria Brent**  
Parent



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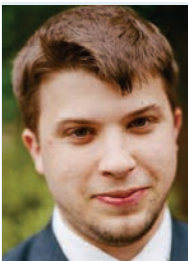
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GOVERNMENT OF THE  
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

**MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR**