



**ADVISORY
COUNCIL** for the
EDUCATION of
STUDENTS with
DISABILITIES

Annual Report

July 1, 2019–June 30, 2020

2019-20 Advisory Council Members

Name	Area of Representation
Dawn Fry, Chair	Parents
Joey Ellis, Vice-Chair	Individuals with Disabilities
Amy Allen	Special Education Administrators
Brian Brown	Parents
David Craig	Private Schools
Jennifer Escue	Parents
Shannon Taylor	Parents
Chantal Hess-Taylor	Parents
Angela Jackson	State & Local Education Officials
Melvin L. Jackson	Organizations Providing Transitional Services
Catherine Knowles	Office of the Coordinator of Homeless Children and Youth
Mary Meador	Juvenile Corrections Agencies
Stephanie Ortego	Teachers
Darlene Walden	Parents
Mark Liverman	Mental Health and Substance Abuse

State of Tennessee
Bill Lee, Governor

Tennessee Department of Education
Penny Schwinn

Tennessee Department of Education, Division of Special Populations
Theresa Nicholls, Assistant Commissioner

Introduction

State and federal guidelines require the Advisory Council for the Education of Student's with Disabilities (Council) provide an annual report to the State Board of Education, the Tennessee Department of Education (department), the governor, and the state legislature. Information included in this report represents the progress made in programs for children with disabilities during fiscal year 2019. It is the Council's intention to work with the department's division of special populations to ensure the provision of appropriate services for children with disabilities throughout the State of Tennessee. This is accomplished through:

- Reporting by the division of special populations to the Council
- Council providing feedback to the division of special populations
- Public input presented to the Council
- Experiences of Council members, who represent consumers

Mission Statement

The Council's mission is to influence policy that shall ensure student success.

Authority

The Council was established in 1972 and is required by [T.C.A. § 49-10-105](#). This legislation states that the Council shall advise and consult with the governor, the commissioner of education, the state board of education, and the director of the division of special education.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) § 1412(a) (21), requires states to establish and maintain an advisory panel to provide policy guidance on special education and related services for children with disabilities. The Council's duties include:

- Advising the department of unmet needs in the education of students with disabilities;
- Commenting publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the state regarding the education of students with disabilities;
- Advising the department in developing evaluations and reporting data to the U.S. Secretary under Section 618;
- Advising the department in developing corrective actions plans to address findings identified in federal monitoring reports under this part;
- Advising the department in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities; and
- Advising the department in serving the needs of students with disabilities in adult prisons.

Part One

T.C.A. § 49-10-105(e)(4) states that the Council shall provide an annual report to the governor, the general assembly and the state board of education that presents the Council's views of the progress or lack of progress made in special education by the state, its agencies and institutions and its school districts during the preceding year. The Council's goals for the period of July 1, 2019–June 30, 2020 are outlined in this section with a summary of the department's work related to the Council goals.

Goal 1

Promote improved student learning/outcomes, including **promoting inclusive educational services** that meet the needs of all students, regardless of their abilities, and promote a sense of belonging and mutual respect for all students while affirming each student's individuality.

Department Work Related to Goal 1

- a. The department's Early Childhood Special Education (619) team focused on promoting quality inclusion for children ages 3–5.
 - The ESCE team provided regional trainings, conference sessions, and ongoing district-level professional development to address ensuring IDEA requirements are met and to promote increasing early childhood inclusion.
 - The ECSE team completed year two of the first SPDG Early Childhood Inclusion Cohort that involved 17 districts receiving training, classroom observations, monthly community of practice calls, and ongoing technical assistance to promote increasing inclusion and enhancing the quality of early childhood programs. These 17 SPDG districts significantly outpaced the rest of the state over the past two years in improving their indicator 6 data, which measures the percentage of children being served in a general education setting and getting the majority of their services, including related services, in that setting.
 - Eighteen new districts were added to the work of the EC SPDG for the third cohort.
 - The department provided training sessions at the PIE conference, in districts, and is hosting the EC SPDG Summit in the summer of 2020 to these new districts on inclusive preschool services.
- b. Course requirements for the Alternate Academic Diploma (AAD), aligned to state standards, were added for middle school grades.
 - Provided trainings throughout the state at the regional conferences, the Partners in Education (PIE) state conference, TAASE, and within districts on AAD implementation including inclusive educational scheduling.
 - 10 trainings were held across the state to support teachers in CDC programs align and deliver instruction aligned to the course requirements. The trainings included scheduling, scope and sequence, and accessible, meaningful instructional delivery.

- c. Twenty-nine new districts were added to the work of the K-12 SPDG (State Personnel Development Grant).
 - The department received over thirty applications and collaboratively chose twenty-six new districts, and three previous districts, to participate in four intensive years of capacity-building professional development.
 - These districts will begin year one in the summer of 2020 with a focus on providing access to instruction for all students during COVID-19.
- d. Provided training on the eligibility and participation criteria for the alternate assessments, with tiered support for districts contributing to the state exceeding 1% participation. Intensive trainings that included a file review were held in the districts with the highest rates of participation.

Goal 2

Promote expanded access and quality of services for students with disabilities (SWD) to better prepare them for **transition into independent living**, meaningful work or post-secondary education.

Department Work Related to Goal 2

- a. The department continued its intentional inter-agency collaboration to improve post-secondary outcomes for students.
 - Continued monthly collaboration with the Employment Roundtable and TransitionTN.
 - Provided content and school district success stories for the 2019 Expect Employment Governor’s Report, which was to the Governor in September of 2019 and attended by multiple members of the TDOE special populations team.
 - Served on the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center Advisory Board and the Vocational Rehabilitation State Rehabilitation Council to discuss ways to transform VR services to in-school students with disabilities, including problem-solving intake and service delivery during the pandemic.
- b. Standards for Work-based Learning (WBL): Special Education Transitions course were finalized and posted.
- c. Hosted the Passport to the Future pre-conference as part of the Partners in Education Conference. Attendance was around 450.
- d. Middle school course requirements for students assessed on the alternate assessment were finalized in collaboration with teachers from across the state.
- e. Diploma options and alternate academic diploma implementation trainings and presentations were made at a multitude of sites and conferences including parent and advocacy groups, schools, school counselors conference, principal training sessions, non-traditional schools conference, PIE, and other venues as requested.

Goal 3

Promote the use of **ongoing assessments and unique accommodations** that will accurately evaluate SWD, while considering the scope of individual needs encountered.

Department Work Related to Goal 3

- a. The department provided trainings and district-specific technical assistance on appropriate and individualized evaluation practices and eligibility requirements.
- b. Grant-funded projects (e.g., TRIAD, TPBS, and TN Talks) provided statewide support to districts on identifying students' unique needs and developing appropriate accommodations focused on communication, social-emotional and behavioral needs.
- c. Developed the ethnographic interview document for assessment specialists to use when evaluating students from linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- d. Updated the document "Reading Resources: Assessments to Inform Present Levels" which builds awareness of various types of reading assessments being used in the state and categorizes the type of information that each can provide for educators and assessment specialists.
- e. Collaborated internally with the assessment team to update the comprehensive assessment accommodations guide for the 2019-20 test administration.
- f. Held regional community of practice sessions for school psychologists to promote the use of appropriate evaluation practices, including evaluations affected by school closures.
- g. The department developed guidance, resources, and emergency rules to ensure eligibility evaluations needs for students were addressed as best as possible during the pandemic and resulting school closures.
- h. Provided guidance for completing the EL assessments with students who have a visual and/or hearing impairment.

Goal 4

Promote increased **quality and quantity of special educators**, general educators, and paraprofessionals serving eligible children and youth with disabilities.

Department Work Related to Goal 4

- a. Working with licensure and educator preparation team (OLEP) to develop policies and guidance for related service provider types.
- b. Hosted a recruitment table at the annual Tennessee Association of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists (TAASLP) convention; ongoing collaboration with TAASLP to promote school-based services and develop regular communities of practice for SLPs.
- c. Regular technical assistance with LEAs clarifying qualifications and roles and responsibilities of related service providers.
- d. Have shared workload vs. caseload considerations and tools for analyzing the staffing needs of special education and related service providers.
- e. Provided training for improving transitions and increasing inclusion for children ages 3-5.

- f. The department conducted a needs assessment to include statewide surveys and follow-up focus groups, addressed shortages and supports needed to provide appropriate technical assistance and promote the recruitment and retention of special educators.
- g. TNTalks continues to add resources to their webpage, support districts and staff directly with student specific needs, and offer trainings for SLPs and other educators to better support the needs of students with complex communication needs.

Goal 5

Promote **sufficient funding for special education services** and encourage the equitable distribution and utilization of funds to promote best practices for students with special needs.

Department Work Related to Goal 5

- a. Participated in discretionary grant review for districts and provided feedback to promote stronger allocation of resources.
- b. Redesigned the IDEA grants process to better leverage these funds to improve outcomes for children with disabilities and drive systemic change by providing districts with the time and resources needed to address critical priorities identified through the district planning process.
 - *IDEA Partnership for Systemic Change (preschool and K-12)*: Awarded a total of \$4 million in grants to 92 school districts for the 2020-21 school year
- c. In response to COVID-19, the department made 2 additional grant opportunities available to school districts:
 - *IDEA Technology Partnership*: Awarded a total of \$1 million in grants to 135 school districts to support the use of technology, assistive technology devices, and technology for telehealth services, to ensure access to services and maximize accessibility to the general education curriculum for children with disabilities
 - *IDEA Innovation Grant*: Released the 2020-21 IDEA Innovation grant to award \$1 million in grants to support innovative ways to remediate lost instruction for students with disabilities during the upcoming school year

Goal 6

Promote improved **use and application of State and local data** related to special education to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

Department Work Related to Goal 6

- a. Completed local determinations for the Annual Performance Report (APR) to determine whether districts were effectively supporting students with disabilities.
 - Met with and provided support to those districts with highest need to offer technical assistance and professional development opportunities to support educators of students with disabilities.
 - Reviewed and approved district improvement plans to ensure that needs identified through the APR determinations were adequately addressed by the district.

- Implemented a data review process to assist districts with understanding their data.
 - Provided districts with self-assessment information to assist with root cause analysis and the development of improvement plans.
- b. The department completed a review of statewide data to help identify areas in need of additional technical assistance through future grant funded contracted work.
 - c. The department reviewed data associated with restraint and isolation to identify districts in need of training, make suggestions to update rules and legislation, and revise reporting processes.
 - d. The department held regular on-going cross divisional meetings to address data obtained across teams in order to identify possible problematic district patterns as well as streamline and coordinate district supports.

Goal 7

Promote **enhanced communication** among the community, educators, the state education agency (SEA) and other stakeholders on special education services.

Department Work Related to Goal 7

- a. Published the Low Incidence disabilities webpage offering a central location for guidance and resources for families, educators, and administrators.
- b. Developed multiple toolkits designed to support LEAs in serving students with disabilities during COVID closures and in preparation for reopening.
- c. A collaborative of the state-funded grants co-developed resources for families and LEAs related to supporting SWD (in part during COVID).
- d. Updated the Instructionally Appropriate Individualized Education Plan (IAIEP) Self-Assessment Tool to align with the monitoring team and improve the usability for educators striving to improve student outcomes through the IEP process.
- e. Presented sessions at a variety of conferences, including TAASE, PIE, regional special education supervisors' conferences, and the state-wide special education supervisors conference on a wide variety of topics related to students with disabilities.
- f. Participated in State Interagency and Local Interagency Coordinating Council meetings.
- g. Attended Special Education Supervisor Study Council meetings in all regions, soliciting feedback and providing information to the groups.
- h. Collaborated quarterly with, and solicited feedback from, the Dyslexia Advisory Council on matters related to reading intervention and the "Say Dyslexia" Law implementation.
- i. Collaborated with The Arc TN to develop reopening documents for families.
- j. Collaboratively worked with the state associations for school psychology and speech-language pathologists to address statewide needs and concerns.
- k. Participated in the school based mental health collaborative with state associations and agencies to help develop resources for school based mental health professionals.
- l. Represented the department on the traumatic brain injury advisory council in order to communicate regarding educational services and inform practices.

- m. Participated in listening sessions with advocates to address concern, obtain input and feedback on developing technical assistance opportunities for school districts, and work collaboratively to develop needed resources for families.
- n. Continued participation with the Council for Developmental Disabilities, Employment Roundtable, Supported Decision Making Council, and Deaf Literacy Council.

Goal 8

Encourage implementation of **RTI²** to promote **positive behavior support** including planning, collaboration, and development of best practices that create a positive learning environment and successful experiences for students with disabilities.

Department Work Related to Goal 8

- a. Provided Pyramid Model trainings in each grand division for district personnel serving children ages 3-5 in SPDG 2.0 EC districts.
- b. Conducted pre- and post- observations utilizing the Teaching Pyramid Model Observation Tool (TPOT) for all 17 early childhood SPDG 2.0 EC districts.
- c. Continued RTI-B training and implementation in collaboration with the Tennessee Behavior Supports Project (TBSP):
 - Conducted training on least restrictive environment (LRE) planning for students with complex behavior and/or needs.
 - Identified model of demonstration schools in the implementation of RTI²-B.
 - Provided an invite-only session at the Partners in Education conference for the model of demonstration schools.
 - Provided technical assistance and training to districts across the state on providing appropriate positive behavior supports.
 - Developed and presented professional development for special education providers on functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans.
 - Restraint and isolation professional development sessions incorporate requirements related to the use of positive behavior intervention supports.
 - Provided classroom management and culture trainings
 - Mentored Model School of Demonstration in coaching and supporting neighboring schools
- d. Conducted guided reviews with districts identified as having significant disproportionality in the area of discipline and provided technical assistance on the development of positive behavior support systems and restorative practices.
- e. Provided technical assistance to districts with discrepant disciplinary practices which included the review of the use of their current positive behavior supports to identify and plan for additional supports needed.
- f. Based on outcomes from a statewide needs assessment, the department identified additional technical assistance supports needed and worked with a national center to help plan for grant funded work which will provide districts with needed resources to improve the implementation of tiered behavioral supports.

Part Two

The table below provides a snapshot count of students with disabilities ages 3–21+ receiving services as of December 1 of each school year. This data does not contain duplications and since used in a federal report, does not include the state-defined exceptionality categories of intellectually gifted and functionally delayed.

School Year	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Specific Learning Disability	44,582	41,952	39,370	37,633	36,282
Speech or Language Impairment	33,064	32,578	32,292	31,960	31,570
Other Health Impairment	16,048	16,898	17,941	18,923	19,850
Intellectual Disability (formerly Mental Retardation)	7,945	8,181	8,389	8,747	8,910
Developmental Delay	9,990	10,602	11,307	12,225	13,039
Emotional Disturbance	3,239	3,259	3,196	3,394	3,479
Autism	9,421	10,432	11,447	12,587	13,619
Multiple Disabilities	2,159	2,146	2,173	2,132	2,108
Hearing Impairment	1,347	1,319	1,289	1,233	1,206
Orthopedic/Physical Impairment	644	597	580	576	568
Visual Impairment	590	592	580	568	535
Traumatic Brain Injury	341	366	361	331	319
Deaf-Blindness	16	14	14	17	15
TOTAL	129,386	128,936	128,939	130,326	131, 500

Statewide SWD Population Data

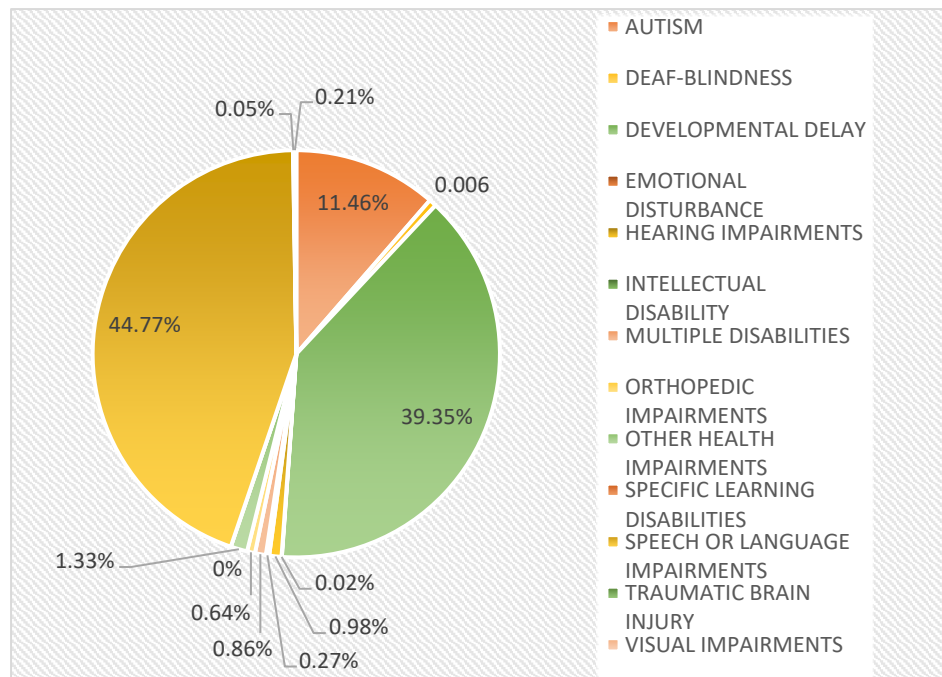
Ages 3-5

Total by Grade	
Grade	Student Count
P3 - (Pre-School)	3665
P4 - (Pre-School)	6220
Kindergarten	5061
1st Grade	10
3rd Grade	2
TOTAL	14958

Total by Gender	
Gender	Student Count
Female	4562
Male	10396
TOTAL	14958

Total by Environment	
Environment	Student Count
Children attending regular early childhood program 10+ hours and receiving majority of special education services in regular early childhood program	4817
Children attending regular early childhood program 10+ hours and receiving majority of special education services in other location	3719
Children attending regular childhood program <10 hours and receiving majority of special education services in regular early childhood program	274
Children attending regular early childhood program <10 hours and receiving majority of special education services in other location	312
Children attending a special education program (not regular early childhood program), and attending a separate special education class	4677
Children attending a special education program (not regular early childhood program), and attending a separate school	76
Children attending a special education program (not regular early childhood program), and attending a residential facility	3
Children attending neither a special education program nor special education program, and getting special education services at home	46
Children attending neither a special education program nor regular education program, and getting special education services at service provider location or other location	1034
TOTAL STUDENTS	14958

Total by Disability	
Disability Category	Student Count
Autism	1715
Deaf-Blindness	1
Developmental Delay	5886
Emotional Disturbance	4
Hearing Impairments	147
Intellectual Disability	41
Multiple Disabilities	130
Orthopedic Impairments	97
Other Health Impairments	200
Specific Learning Disabilities	0
Speech or Language Impairments	6697
Traumatic Brain Injury	8
Visual Impairments	32
TOTAL	14958



Statewide SWD Population Data

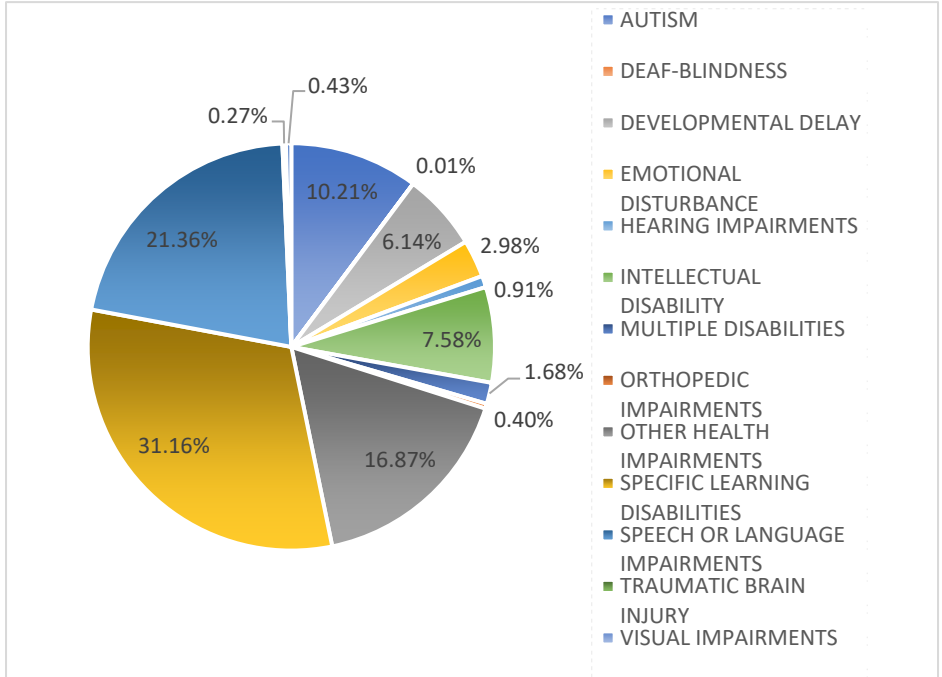
Ages 6-21

Total by Grade	
Grade	Student Count
P3	11
P4	35
K	3586
T1	10
1	10055
2	10256
3	10293
4	9764
5	9686
6	9596
7	9236
8	9072
9	9203
10	8690
11	8320
12	8637
TOTAL	116450

Total by Environment	
Environment	Student Count
Inside a regular classroom 80% or more each school day	83739
Inside a regular classroom 40% - 79% of each school day	16603
Inside a regular classroom less than 40% of each school day	13125
Attending a separate school	808
Attending a residential facility	226
Homebound or in a hospital	697
Correctional facilities	63
Parentally placed in private school	1189
GRAND TOTAL	116450

Total by Gender	
Gender	Student Count
Female	39383
Male	77067
TOTAL	116450

Total by Disability	
Disability Category	Student Count
Autism	11186
Deaf-Blindness	14
Developmental Delay	7153
Emotional Disturbance	3470
Hearing Impairments	1058
Intellectual Disability	8830
Multiple Disabilities	1955
Orthopedic Impairments	471
Other Health Impairments	19647
Specific Learning Disabilities	36280
Speech or Language Impairments	24872
Traumatic Brain Injury	311
Visual Impairments	503
TOTAL	116540



Part Three

All agendas and minutes for the fiscal year 2019 Council meetings can be found on the department's website ([here](#)). Meetings were convened on:

- July 15, 2019
- October 21, 2019
- January 13, 2020
- April 27, 2020