

**Overview of the State Advisory Council  
On the Education of Children with Disabilities  
Formerly the State Advisory Council for Special Education**

The State Advisory Council (SAC) on the Education of Children with Disabilities was initially established to comply with federal special educational laws<sup>i</sup> requiring each state to have such a council to help set state policy. It is currently a requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The SAC is charged with the following responsibilities<sup>ii</sup>:

- To advise the state superintendent of public instruction and the state board of education regarding all rules pertaining to children with disabilities.
- To recommend approval or rejection of completed comprehensive plans for delivery of special education and related services submitted by school corporations acting individually or on a joint school services program basis with other corporations.
- To advise the department of education of unmet needs within the state in the education of children with disabilities.
- To comment publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the state board of education regarding the education on children with disabilities;
- To advise the department of education in developing evaluations and reporting data to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education under 20 U.S.C. 1418;
- To advise the department of education in developing corrective action plans to address findings identified in federal monitoring reports under U.S.C. §1400 et seq.; and,
- To advise the department of education in developing and implementing policies related to the coordination of services for children with disabilities.

All appointments to the SAC are made by the Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dr. Tony Bennett. To be appointed, members of the Council must be citizens of Indiana who are representative of the state's population and selected on the basis of their involvement in or concern with the education of children with disabilities. By state law, at least one half of the members must be individuals with disabilities or the parents of students with disabilities. Members must also include teachers, state and local education officials, program administrators, representatives of various state agencies, representatives of higher education institutions that prepare special education and related service personnel, representatives of nonpublic schools, and representatives of vocational, community, or business organizations concerned with the provision of transitional services to children with disabilities.

There are currently three individuals appointed to the Council that serve exclusively as parent representatives. However, members may hold multiple roles on the Council. For example, a teacher that has a child with a disability would fulfill the statutory requirement to have a teacher on the Council, and would count towards having a majority of members being a parent of or an individual with a disability on the council.

One such Council member is Kristi Tesmer. She is both a school psychologist for West Central Indiana Special Services Cooperative and is the parent of a student with an IEP. Her training as a school psychologist affords her the opportunity to represent the school system. But her experiences as a parent—who at one point invoked due process to meet her child’s needs—allow her to see things from the “family” perspective.

Ms. Tesmer says she views her multiple roles on the SAC as advantageous. “My primary role is to improve how the system impacts children, because I am able to see things from both sides of the table. Because of my position as a school psychologist, I know what’s going on in the schools and can help keep parents informed.” She cited the new IEP system currently being implemented in Indiana as an example. She has first-hand experience with it both as a professional and as a parent, and describes it as “cumbersome” in that the electronic records don’t always “match up” with the paper trail for a student’s IEP. So parents and teachers alike are concerned about compliance, meeting deadlines, etc.

She goes on to say that she hopes to use the knowledge she has gained from working within the schools to advocate for the child. “It’s hard enough for me, and I’m a part of the system. It must be even harder for parents! On the Council, I hope I can be a voice for kids.”

Ms. Tesmer admits that being a voice isn’t always easy. Frequently, the SAC does not have a quorum at its meetings, so its function is limited. Further, she has often felt that the meetings carry more of an informational tone than an advisory one. “It seems that the meetings often consist of announcements about decisions that have already been made rather than an opportunity to provide feedback or input on decisions in process.” In the future, she would like to see SAC members informed in advance so that they could act in more of an advisory capacity.

Ms. Tesmer adds that she has also faced some practical challenges in serving on the Council. When she was first appointed to the SAC, reimbursements covered expenses such as gas, parking, and childcare, but reimbursement is now limited to mileage and parking. Still, she recognizes that she is able to use a “professional day” as a school psychologist to attend Council meetings, but that other parents may have no such option. She also acknowledges that for some parents, childcare is a hurdle to parent participation, citing a parent who has served on the Council for many years and has always had to arrange respite care for her child with a disability in order to attend meetings.

Finally, Ms. Tesmer encourages parents to get involved and to send their resume and a letter stating their interest to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dr. Tony Bennett. “Dr. Bennett is aware of openings on the council that need to be filled, but those seats remain open. Filling those seats would mean the SAC would be more likely to achieve a quorum at its meetings.” Inquiries may be directed to Dr. Bennett at [superintendent@doe.in.gov](mailto:superintendent@doe.in.gov) or by calling 317-232-6610.

It should be noted that a parent serving on the SAC may qualify for the Family Leadership Development Fund. To inquire about this fund or to request an application, contact Family Voices Health Information Center by calling 317-944-8982 or by emailing [Jennifer@fvindiana.org](mailto:Jennifer@fvindiana.org).

Parents not serving on the SAC who want to express their concerns and ideas regarding special education in Indiana should direct their comments to any current Council member. The list of Council members may be found at <https://www.doe.in.gov/exceptional/advisory/>.

It should also be noted that at the time this article was being written, the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) was in the process of transitioning to a new website, so be aware that some of its website information may be temporarily inaccessible or even outdated. However, IDOE has indicated that the next SAC meeting is scheduled for October 13, 2011 at 9:00am at 151 W. Ohio Street in Indianapolis.

Should you have any additional questions regarding the SAC, you are encouraged to contact the Center for Exceptional Learners using the information below.

Contact Information:  
Center for Exceptional Learners  
Indiana Department of Education  
151 West Ohio Street  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204  
Phone: 317-232-0570  
Toll Free: 877-851-4106  
Fax: 317-232-0589  
[specialed@doe.in.gov](mailto:specialed@doe.in.gov)  
[www.doe.state.in.us/exceptional](http://www.doe.state.in.us/exceptional)

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<sup>i</sup> The first reference may be found in P.L. 91-230

<sup>ii</sup> Drafted January 16, 1998. The language in the law is below: