

## Reports to the Field

### **Nicole Guysi:**

- Parents are concerned about past special education services and future (i.e. will minutes be made up when some students received "instruction" via email and not virtually).
- The news interviewed a representative from Peoria about what they are possibly considering for the next school year. This has a lot of chatter going on as to 1) when should parents expect to hear from their district and 2) concerns about how the next school year will look (i.e. if students only attend certain days, where do they go on the days they don't attend school).
- CDC has released guidelines for going back to school which has parents wondering if their district/school will be following all the guidelines and if so, how that will look

While each district decides for themselves how to move forward, it would seem wise for the Arizona State Board of Education to give advisement to districts on how they should plan to handle the next school year. Each district is obviously unique in what they will be able to offer and what their area of challenges will be, those should be addressed to minimize fear in parents while also allowing parents time to not only plan for themselves (especially if this will impact their work schedule) but also prepare their children.

Personally, our daughter's special education services were not implemented in the best way however, I also understood this was an extremely unique situation that the school/district was not prepared for. I commend our daughters' team for doing their best and have no complaints (although I have heard many complaints from the field about this very thing). Schools do have the Summer to plan their best for special education services for the coming school year and my level of expectation is higher considering there is more time to plan, so I am hoping they will take into consideration families concerns and challenges as they come up with the best way to go into the next school year.

### **Shaylyn Savage:**

Teachers worked hard this quarter to provide individualized specialized instruction. It was a roller coaster as things were changing, but guidance was helpful. Many teachers are filling out the survey to give feedback on what went well and what needs improvement for distance learning as we move forward as a state.

### **Martha Cocchiarella**

Preservice educators will begin a professional program pathway this coming fall (2020) to service individuals with visual impairments. Preservice educators upon completion of the program will be certified in SPE (K-12) with an emphasis on visual impairment. This is a partnership with the Foundation for Blind Children (FBC). VI-centric courses will be taught by individuals from the FBC.

## **Kristina Blackledge**

Representing private schools, I would like to report that there is little guidance from the Superintendent and Governor regards to school closure due to COVID-19 specific to private schools. The last guidance was issued on March 30 stating, "Private schools are required to remain closed in alignment with federal guidance recommending closures through at least April 30, 2020. School leaders have the option of announcing closures through the end of the year or waiting for additional guidance."

There has been no additional guidance from local, state, or federal government specific to private schools. The lack of inclusion for all educational institutions in such matters are concerning.

Further, the guidance that was provided required *all* schools to continue to provide access to learning opportunities despite closures, yet it is my understanding that some private school closed completely meaning they did not provide any alternative learning opportunities. This is concerning, particularly for students with disabilities due to known likelihood of regression.

Last, there is an emerging alternative schooling opportunity called "micro-school" that appears to be a hybrid between cooperative schooling and homeschooling. This adds to the private businesses who establish themselves as a school learning environment in order to access tuition-assistance programs yet fail to adhere to zoning and safety (not to mention educational) regulations for school environments. I understand the struggle to manage these requirements personally as a school owner and leader, yet, it must be done for the safety of staff and children. Not all businesses who operate as a school adhere to the same. This is concerning.

More needs to be done to monitor and protect the needs of students with disabilities in alternative settings despite parent choice, legislature, business marketing, and trends.

## **Kara Swierz**

Some areas that have come up are: With the unexpected transition to distant learning, students and families have been placed into uncharted territory that has had very different outcomes depending on many different situations and dynamics. While one child may be thriving, another may be struggling. Equity is something that is almost impossible to obtain.

1. Questions on what compensatory services maybe available for individuals provided with enrichment learning only.
2. There has been inconsistency with the level of support and involvement provided by Educators and Supportive Services depending on district or school during school closures.
3. Some questions continue to exist:
  - a. What will next year look like for all students but especially to those at risk with health concerns?
  - b. How do we continue to make inclusion and accessing the general education classroom a priority during distant learning?
  - c. Is retaining students requiring special education services an option during these extenuation circumstances due to school closures?
4. We personally have been pleased with the commitment and support provided by the educators in our elementary school. There has been enhanced communication, partnership, and collaboration that distant learning has required between the educators and family. We look forward to this continued partnership and parent involvement. We hope that the positive outcomes from distant learning helps reshape the future in special education.

## **Susan Voirol**

In hearing from constituents, since the last SEAP, on the needs of the community as it relates to vocational/employment and other here is my update:

- Since the pandemic, the UArizona Sonoran UCEDD (SUCEDD)/Employment First has been delivering a series of webinars titled Adapting Virtually to provide employment supports. State agency representatives, service providers, individuals, and families have joined to support and learn about innovative approaches and engage in conversation to address many of the systemic issues impacting employment services and outcomes in the state, for people who have disabilities. You can find recorded webinars & additional info here: [bit.ly/adptvirtucedd](http://bit.ly/adptvirtucedd)
- The SUCEDD offered and delivered a weekly series in April/May of virtual webinars to assist in guiding high school students and young adults, in selected schools in Southern AZ, through employment related topics. In supporting the needs of the community, we hope to continue offering additional engaging opportunities related to employment and transition topical areas in the future.
- The Arizona Center for Disability Law, Raising Special Kids, the University of Arizona Sonoran Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, and the Institute for Human Development will be conducting a 3-part webinar on the impact of COVID-19 and Special Education. This series will include online sessions to gauge the education and schooling needs of the community, to provide information and resources, and Q&A. Contact Ms. Glass for additional info [aglass@azdisabilitylaw.org](mailto:aglass@azdisabilitylaw.org)
- UArizona Sonoran UCEDD is wrapping up the statewide Exploration of Transition Services Study, individual school interviews. A survey will be developed and disseminated across the state to gather the most comprehensive feedback in the coming months. Once the study is completed a report of the findings will be widely disseminated.
- The State AZ Community of Practice on Transition is working to finalize the Comprehensive Transition Guide for Families & Students. This will be distributed widely once complete.
- Project SEARCH, a transition-to-work program for individuals who have ID/DD, is expanding. 2 new business sites will begin this Fall with the Gilbert and Paradise Valley School Districts. As the administrator of Project SEARCH AZ, the SUCEDD will continue to work with the business community and schools to consider developing additional sites across AZ to expand opportunities for students who have disabilities. For info: [bit.ly/projsearchaz](http://bit.ly/projsearchaz)

## **Megan Conrad**

Arizona Department of Child Safety has continued to ensure children are safe from abuse and neglect by investigating all reports as we did prior to COVID. Visits between parents and their children in out of home care were conducted virtually from March 19th through May 29th. Monthly, in person child contacts were completed using virtual visits from March 18th through May 15th. DCS caregivers for youth in care, supported children and youth in their educational plans by working with schools to obtain additional laptops and learning supports. During the pandemic, caregivers and children in foster care experienced similar challenges to families outside the foster care system. DCS received great support from community partners to ensure that children and families had access to resources, supplies, and support during these times.

## **Kathleen Puckett**

Area: Higher Education Programs preparing teachers for students with disabilities

These past few months have brought challenges and opportunities for practices in the preparation of teachers for inclusive practices.

### **National Scene:**

Colleges and universities (Institutes of Higher Education, or IHEs) are concerned about enrollment for fall, and how that might impact their programs. Reports of salary reductions and layoffs among IHEs are trickling in.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), a professional special education organization, is offering free membership to teachers and teacher candidates. Their website offers information on strategies for teaching remotely.

### **State Scene:**

Due to social distancing restrictions, most teacher education programs had to switch to online only courses with very little preparation time. For special education teacher candidates, professors used resources offered by CEC and the CEEDAR center, such as classroom videos and online modules, to supplement their work. Most classes have been conducted using online platforms, such as zoom, and learning management systems, such as Canvas or Blackboard.

Concern continues regarding budgeting shortfalls that may result in hiring freezes or reduction in force measures in colleges of education. The 3 major universities are limiting the hiring of faculty associates and may announce more cost containment strategies as enrollment becomes clearer.

### **Local Scene: Arizona State University, Mary Lou Fulton College of Education**

The college instituted Sun Devils Learning Labs as an online service for k-12 students to view online lessons that could supplement their course work. These lessons also provide practice opportunities for teacher candidates. Lessons are developed using Zoom and then uploaded to a specific YOUTUBE channel with a schedule of lessons.

The dean has instituted programs to support students financially during this COVID era. Using special funds from the University Foundation and seeking additional contributions from faculty and staff, she has designed a tuition support program and employment opportunities through the Sun Devils Learning Labs.

Kathleen Puckett, Erin Rotheram-Fuller, and Nancy Scherer submitted an Office of Special Education Programs Personal Preparation grant for the interdisciplinary training of Speech language pathologists and Autism Specialists.

## **Julie Niven**

Juvenile Detention:

- Each detention center in the state ran a little different during the school closure. Some stayed open fully and some open partially.
- In Pinal County, Juveniles received direct instruction via remote learning (zoom) for 9 weeks. Students with IEP's received services via zoom calls as needed as well as IEP meetings were held virtually. In addition, students received packet work in all subject areas at both the juvenile detention facility and adult detention for 18 - 22 adults with IEP's.

### **Nancy Williams**

Parents are concerned about what school and services will look like for their children at the start of the school year. Will there be a mixed model? Will students be able to get their services in person if that is what they need if it is only virtual? Will IEPs be rewritten to reflect a new model if there is one? Many of the same questions that educators have are out there and that we don't know the answers to yet. It is important to convey that many parents work and there are fewer opportunities for adequate supervision of students with disabilities than there are for students without disabilities. Quality childcare is hard enough, but then when you look at more significant needs that cannot be met there is an issue with parents being able to work.

From groups that I am in, it seems that some parents may want to switch schools based on those reopening to school sites because they need to have their children in school. Others are considering ESA for a smaller environment choice which could be concerning if the private school cannot meet all the needs of the students. It is important to remember that parents are not their children's teachers, they are the support for their children and need to be in the parenting role.

### **Julie Bartanen**

Top Issues/ Concerns at the Time:

- The provision of services in virtual contexts. The implications, the need for comp ed, etc.
- The lack of flexibility from the feds and possible/pending litigation from parents demanding evaluations, child find, etc. Conflicting Information from the federal level (OCR and OSEP) about evaluations specifically screenings and child find.
- Virtual ESY and how students with more significant needs will be provided services.
- Official Communication from ADE v. Informal Communication via chains of emails.
- Future Safety precautions, changes in DHS regulations, etc. Funding support to implement changes.

### **Sophia Lenny**

Many parents I have spoken with have had concerns regarding their child's special education services during the school closure. Many have reported that their child has had great difficulty with changes to their usual routine. Parents also feel that schools have made good efforts under the circumstances. Many parents are anxious to know what next school year will bring for their child's education.

## **Christopher Tiffany**

As a parent of a child with disabilities eligible for Special Education our experience with school over the past 2 months has been much the same as Parents of Children with disabilities in Arizona that Raising Special Kids has served during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Initial struggles with unfamiliar technology platforms to deliver special education services
- Varied skill level to manage technology by teachers and instructional assistants
- Student response to social isolation and change in routines has been challenging
- Communication from school has been excellent. Frequent and ongoing email, phone and text messaging were used to engage our family

Challenges reported by constituency of parents of children with disabilities related to education:

- Lack of access to technology to participate in online/virtual platforms
- Monolingual parents' inability to communicate with educators (language access)
- Parents' inadequate skill level in learning/operating online/virtual platforms
- Balancing work and school hours from home, especially in households with multiple children
- Most parents/families report good communication from their children's educators

Additional unique concerns:

- Part C to Preschool (619) transition confusion for families
- Preschool to Kindergarten transition confusion, especially when evaluation is in progress or incomplete
- General anxiety and concern for basic needs (food, housing, loss of income, etc.) taking priority over educational needs of child