

## **Reports from the Field**

### **Member: Martha Cocchiarella**

#### Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport: Rolls Out the Compassion Cacti Program

Travelers can expect to receive assistance should they need extra help. Being offered is the use of a neon green lanyard, with a saguaro cactus pattern on it. Wearing this, alerts airport personnel, the wearer needs extra assistance due to a condition such as autism. The program stresses compassion for the needs of the person wearing it. For obtaining a lanyard, visit: <https://www.skyharbor.com> Medical documentation is not needed.

#### Arizona State University: Title Change of Disability Resource Center

The Disability Resource Center at ASU has changed their name to Student Accessibility and Inclusive Learning Services (SAILS). SAILS will continue the commitment to service and support students with varied disabilities.

### **Member: Kathleen Puckett**

COVID shut-downs have impacted delivery of classes and field experiences for special education teacher candidates. At ASU, on-campus classes are held simultaneously 3 ways: in person, synchronous, and asynchronous. Quite a feat! Courses have been adapted for candidates to get in practice-based opportunities with individual children known to them, with peers, or analyzing videos (such as HLP videos from CEC). Interns are developing team-based lessons that will be delivered in the Mesa district, remotely. Student teachers follow the lead of their mentor teachers, using the technology as assigned by their school district. More broadly, across the state, the CEEDAR team of teacher educators across Arizona's IHEs are looking at teacher shortages and field-based responses to remote instruction through national affinity group webinars. We certainly understand the burden that these new instructional strategies have put on students and their families. While we have received multiple requests for student teachers to be placed in homes with special needs children for their instruction, our policies will not allow these placements. We forward such requests to the instructors in the event that individual students would wish to follow up with such requests on their own, as employees of the parent.

### **Member: Shaylyn Savage**

Distance learning has been challenging. A positive is that special education teachers who were not coteaching while in the in-person setting, are now coteaching in the virtual environment. Also, teachers are being innovative, and are building relationships and engaging students. A concern is students not being active participants in their learning and therefore, are not receiving their special education services. Accommodations have also been difficult to implement especially in the areas of visuals and manipulatives. A concern for teachers in the hybrid model is the difficulty of balancing large case loads while teaching in two different models.

### **Member: Kara Swierz**

As Districts begin to shift from online to in-person learning, there continues to be a concern for safety, equity, and options for students that require special education services. Our district has chosen to bring students back to brick and mortar earlier than voted on a month ago. To change plans halfway into a quarter is disruptive to the educators, their students and families. Every individual has been stretched to their limits and having some form of stability and consistency is imperative. A constant state of change is tough for both the student and the family. Students who can't return to campus for several reasons such as health risk factors, online learning is less than ideal and so I can empathize with the districts as they attempt to find solutions for so many tough concerns. Other conversations include how to find creative ways to collect data on students virtually, which is both accurate and meaningful to reflect progress or regression on a student's IEP. Lastly, I want to extend my deepest gratitude towards all of the educators and administration that have worked tirelessly to attempt to educate our students in new and less than ideal circumstances. It has been a privilege to be a part of such strength, commitment, and kindness. Thank You

**Member: Susan Voirol**

Update as it relates to vocational/employment and transition:

- The Arizona Center for Disability Law, Raising Special Kids, the SUCEDD, and the Institute for Human Development conducted a 3-part webinar on the impact of COVID-19 and Special Education. This series was to gauge the education and schooling needs of the community and to provide information and resources.
- The SUCEDD offered and delivered the first round of 4 separate, 2-day trainings for those working with individuals with disabilities: addressing supported employment, job coaching, best practices, and many other topics around employment. We had many educators/transition specialists across AZ join.
- The UArizona Sonoran UCEDD (SUCEDD)/Employment First has continued to deliver a series of webinars titled Adapting Virtually to provide employment supports. With State agency leaders support we are addressing and providing practical strategies/ideas to our audience members. Recorded webinars & additional info here: [bit.ly/adptvirtucedd](https://bit.ly/adptvirtucedd)
- SUCEDD and VR have entered an agreement to conduct a statewide model development project addressing Pre-Employment Transition Services. We will be working with selected schools, agency providers, families, and students to address the needs and TA, specifically around work-based learning, however addressing any of the Pre-ETS areas as identified by the above team members involved.
- Project SEARCH, a transition-to-work program for individuals who have ID/DD, expanded to 2 new business sites that began with Gilbert Public Schools at Banner Health and Paradise Valley School Districts at Mayo Clinic. The SUCEDD continues 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](https://bit.ly/projsearchaz)
- SUCEDD conducted our Adulting Workshop (for families and youth) virtually and had a different topical area covered every Saturday in August for 90 minutes. Spoke with families and learned of needs in the areas of healthcare, employment, person centered planning and other.
- UArizona Sonoran UCEDD will be finalizing the statewide Exploration of Transition Services Study this Fall/Winter. A statewide survey will be developed and disseminated to gather the most comprehensive feedback across AZ. Once the study is completed a report of the findings will be widely disseminated.
- The State AZ Community of Practice on Transition is continuing to work on/finalize the Comprehensive Transition Guide for Families & Students. This will be distributed widely once complete.
- Finalizing an AZ toolkit for employers addressing disabilities in the workplace, etc. Hope to finalize and release in October.

**Member: Christopher Tiffany**

Raising Special Kids has fielded many calls from families reporting general struggles accessing and facilitating the education of their child/children with disabilities from home, in distance learning arrangements. Many of the same challenges all Arizona families face: balancing work-from-home and monitoring education and special education delivery, facilitating and monitoring the education of multiple children, feeling confident and understanding curriculum to be able to facilitate child's learning in a virtual environment, and weighing options to return to in-person learning.

Additional specific issues families have had questions about include:

**Waivers:** school districts requiring families to sign waivers (content of waiver varies from district to district) in order to have child physically back on a school campus.

**Evaluations:** many families report that evaluations are still 'on hold', eligibility decisions being made more frequently based on reviews of existing data (additional assessments are being determined not needed). Families with children who were in the initial evaluation process when pandemic began report confusion around timelines for completion.

**Masks/safety protocols:** families report that mask requirements may hinder their child's return to school, that their child cannot or will not wear a mask. Conversely, a family's decision to send their child to school is dependent upon safety protocols established by the school, including mask requirements.

**Placement/location:** schools/districts making blanket placement/location decisions, citing FAPE and without convening an IEP Team, for students with disabilities (ex.: all students with a certain percentage of time apart from non-disabled peers [less than 40% of their day in general education settings] can only receive a FAPE with on-site services; parents have the choice to participate in distance learning, however, they are informed that child cannot receive a FAPE; etc.)

Recent collaborative efforts of the Arizona Department of Education, the Division of Developmental Disabilities, the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), and other state agencies have resulted in providing assistance to families of Arizona Long Term Care eligible students by allowing home and community based services to be used during school hours to facilitate remote learning. We believe this will provide much needed relief for families struggling with facilitating the education of their child with a disability while balancing work-from-home and other priorities.

Raising Special Kids provides regular virtual workshops, in English and Spanish, on the special education process, IEPs, navigating distance learning, Positive Behavior Support, Transition to Adulthood, and others. Weekly Facebook Live events feature guests from state agencies (ADE, DDD, AzEIP, etc.) and other community partners that provide information for families on education and healthcare topics as COVID-19 continues to keep families isolated.

Work on Compensatory Education services information for families, in collaboration with the Arizona Department of Education, is in progress.