



Advisory Council for the Education of Students with Disabilities

2021-22 Annual Report

Tennessee Department of Education | May 2024



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2021-22 Advisory Council Members

Name	Area of Representation
Joey Ellis, Chair	Individuals with Disabilities
Scott Rupe, Vice-Chair	Disability Advocate
Amy Allen	Special Education Administrators
Virginia Crump	State Corrections Representative
David Craig	Private Schools
Jennifer Escue	Parents
Shannon Taylor	Parents
Chantal Hess-Taylor	Parents
Angela Jackson	State and Local Education Officials
Melvin L. Jackson	Organizations Providing Transitional Services
Catherine Knowles	Office of the Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youth
Tammy Day	Higher Education Institutes Representative
Stephanie Ortego	Teachers
Darlene Walden	Parents
Mark Liverman	Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Representative
Allie Plofchan	Representative of Charter Schools

State of Tennessee
Bill Lee, Governor

Tennessee Department of Education
Dr. Penny Schwinn, Commissioner
of Education

Tennessee Department of Education
Division of Special Education and Intervention Program
Dr. Jennifer Jordan, Assistant Commissioner

Introduction

State law requires the Advisory Council for the Education of Students with Disabilities (Council) provide an annual report to the State Board of Education, the governor, and the state legislature. [See T.C.A. § 49-10-105\(e\)\(4\)](#). The information included in this report represents the progress made in programs for children with disabilities during the 2021-22 fiscal year. It is the council's intention to work with the Tennessee Department of Education (department) 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, and
- experiences of Council members, who represent constituents.

Mission Statement

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

Authority

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires states to establish and maintain an advisory panel to provide policy guidance on special education and related services for children with disabilities. 20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(21); 34 C.F.R. § 300.167. In Tennessee, the council is required by [T.C.A. § 49-10-105](#) and was established in 1972. State and federal law require the council to 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 council's duties include:

- advising the Tennessee Department of Education 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 Secretary of the United States Department of Education as required by 20 U.S.C. § 1418;
- advising the department in developing corrective actions plans to address findings identified in federal monitoring reports under IDEA;
- 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, 2021 – June 30, 2022, are outlined in this section with a summary of the department's work related to the council goals.

Goal 1 – Promoting Inclusive Educational Services

Promote improved student learning/outcomes, including **encouraging 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 focused on increasing the access of students with complex needs¹ to meaningful, standards-aligned instruction with the state personnel development grant, Teaching All Students (TAS). The first cohort is composed of 18 high school teams representing all eight regions and both rural and urban districts. The kick-off training was highly successful, and the schools have all engaged in coaching sessions to continue the work. Cohort two began in the summer of 2022.
- b. A professional learning network was provided through the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) 3.0 Access for All shift into the Access for All Learning Network (AALN) to better align with the department's initiatives by ensuring students with disabilities have access to high-quality instructional materials and literacy instruction and intervention. There are 14 K-12 districts and 17 early childhood districts participating in ongoing professional learning.
- c. Stakeholder input was received, and the department began development of an Instructionally Appropriate Individualized Education Program (IAIEP) webinar series. This set of modules will be made available to all to ensure that instructionally appropriate IEPs are written to improve student outcomes.
- d. Support was provided through the TN Talks grant to practitioners and district leaders by working to provide appropriate communication systems to students with complex communication needs and ensure that staff are knowledgeable and training on the implementation of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).
 - a. Hosted monthly AAC Helpline calls.
- e. Two resources were released on Assistive Technology (AT). *What is Assistive Technology?* and *AT FAQ* were needed to improve outcomes for students with disabilities as only 4% of students with disabilities in Tennessee school districts were reported to be using AT to access educational opportunities. These resources further help Tennessee school districts as they consider appropriate AT to ensure student access across a variety of educational domains.
- f. The Tennessee Technical Assistance Network (TN-TAN) was launched to provide districts and families access to free, high-quality training, resources, and support designed to improve outcomes for students with disabilities, ages 3-22 in the areas of autism, intensive behavior, preschool access, and tiered supports. During this first year, the TN-TAN network provided services to 122 of the 144 (85%) Tennessee school districts within each grand division as follows:
 - a. East TN: 42 of the 52 districts (81%)
 - b. Middle TN: 45 of the 50 districts (90%)
 - c. West TN: 35 of the 42 districts (83%)

¹ "Students with complex needs" refers to students with cognitive disabilities and students with multiple disabilities (including cognitive) or who present as having a cognitive disability. This definition includes both students who meet eligibility requirements for the alternate assessments and those who do not.

Goal 2 – Transitioning into Independent Living

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 focused on transition in addition to instructional equity within the TAS initiative. The training includes a focus on meaningful, interest-based transition planning and intervention. The first cohort is composed of 18 high school teams representing all eight regions and both rural and urban districts. The kick-off training was highly successful, and the schools have all engaged in coaching sessions to continue the work. Cohort two will begin in the summer of 2022.
- b. Three Transition Academies were held in each grand division with professional learning on focused transition planning to support students with disabilities and improving post school outcomes. Over 200 attendees (i.e., special education directors, special education providers, pre-employment transition service providers) benefited from these academies.
- c. Intentional inter-agency collaboration was continued to improve postsecondary outcomes for students.
 - a. The Employment Roundtable and Transition TN was collaborated with monthly.
 - b. Members of the department served on the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center Advisory Board and the Vocational Rehabilitation State Rehabilitation Council to discuss ways to transform vocational rehabilitation (VR) services for students with disabilities.
- d. Training and guidance on high-quality transition planning was developed.
- e. There was increased collaboration with career and technical education (CTE) to improve access for students with disabilities.

Goal 3 – Ongoing Assessments

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. Four collaborative communities of practice for speech language pathologists and school psychologists were hosted to improve evaluation practices. The sessions included evaluating for specific learning disability versus language impairment, differential diagnosis between language impairment and specific learning disability, and considerations for students who are English Language Learners.
- b. Intensive support and on-site training were provided to eight districts who had findings of disproportionate representation.
- c. Twenty-two communities of practice were held for school psychologists with topics including conducting reevaluations, evaluating for autism, and alternate assessment eligibility versus participation.
- d. Guidance documents were created related to ruling out lack of instruction, initial consent, and Other Health Impairment and medical evaluations.
- e.

Goal 4 – Quality and Quantity of Special Educators

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. New licensure pathways were issued for speech-language pathology assistants and revised policy so that speech-language pathologists meet professional school services personnel licensure requirements with verification of a current and valid professional ASHA certification or related healthcare license.

- b. The Speech-Language Pathology Services Guidance was released. This guidance document supports Tennessee school districts as they work to ensure appropriately licensed speech-language personnel are providing services to students with disabilities. Tennessee school districts have a clear outline on how to best utilize their speech-language personnel (i.e., speech-language pathologists, speech-language pathology assistants, speech-language teachers) such that the quality of services to students with disabilities is high quality and aligns with the professional's educational training.
- c. The school leader's companion guide to the Special Education Framework, *School Leadership for Special Education* was released. This guide was developed as a resource for non-special education leaders, such as school principals and other building-level administrators. The guide is intended to assist LEA designees with facilitating IEP meetings and understanding the LEA obligations related to the implementation of special education programs.
- d. Free opportunities to become a teacher were developed, which included 65 partnerships between school districts and educator preparation programs at colleges or universities across Tennessee, through the Grow Your Own Initiative.

Goal 5 – Sufficient Funding for Special Education Services

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. Through a competitive application process, the department provided districts the opportunity to attain *IDEA Partnership for Systemic Change Grants* (preschool and K-12): Awarded over \$2.8 million in grants (18 preschool and 40 K-12) for the 2021-22 school year.
- b. Resources and leverage funding were aligned to improve outcomes for students with disabilities through a coordinated and evaluated network of free, strategic support to school districts through the TN-TAN.

Goal 6 – Use and Application of State and Local Data

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. Local determinations were completed for the Annual Performance Report (APR) to determine whether districts were effectively supporting students with disabilities.
 - a. Meetings and support were provided to those districts with the highest need in order to offer technical assistance and professional development opportunities to support educators of students with disabilities.
 - b. District improvement plans were reviewed and approved to ensure that needs identified through the APR determinations were adequately addressed by the district.
 - c. Districts were provided with self-assessment information to assist with root cause analysis and the development of improvement plans.
- b. A review of statewide data was completed to help identify areas of need regarding intellectually gifted child find.
- c. Regular, on-going, cross-divisional meetings were held to address data obtained across teams in order to identify possible problematic district patterns as well as streamline and coordinate district supports.

Goal 7 – Enhanced Communication

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. Sessions were presented at various conferences, including the Tennessee Association of Administrators in Special Education (TAASE), regional special education supervisors' conferences, and the state-wide special education supervisors' conference on a wide variety of topics related to students with disabilities.
- b. Monthly special education supervisor calls were held to communicate updates from the department related to students with disabilities and gather feedback from LEAs.
- c. Bi-monthly virtual calls were held with school psychologists to share resources and discuss evaluation questions.
- d. Monthly office hours were hosted for related service providers.
- e. Listening sessions were participated in with advocates to address concerns, obtain input and feedback on developing technical assistance opportunities for school districts, and work collaboratively to develop needed resources for families.
- f. State Interagency and Local Interagency Coordinating Council meetings were participated in.
- g. Special Education Supervisor Study Council meetings were attended (virtually) in all regions, soliciting feedback and providing information to the groups.
- h. The ARC TN was collaborated with to develop resources and coordinate listening sessions to enhance family and community engagement.
- i. Participation with the Council for Developmental Disabilities, Employment Roundtable, Supported Decision Making Council, and Deaf Literacy Council was continued.
- j. Monthly collaboration was continued with the Employment Roundtable and Transition TN.
- l. Content and school district success stories were provided for the 2020 Expect Employment Governor's Report, which was sent to the Governor in September of 2020 and attended by multiple members of the TDOE special populations team.
- k. Members of the department 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.

Goal 8 – RTI²

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. Through the TN-TAN network, the Tennessee Tiered Support Center provided training at district and school levels to build capacity around the alignment of RTI²-A and RTI²-B. This year, they have offered districts in partnership two major trainings, an overview of this alignment and tier I for RTI.
- b. Through the TN-TAN network, the Tennessee Tiered Support Center develops resources to support and promote a positive learning environment. This year, they created a resource pack *Responding to Challenging Behavior* that includes six implementation tools.
- c. Data-Based Decision-Making training was conducted at TAASE to encourage the analysis of all data to support students academically and behaviorally. Additionally, this training was also presented virtually and recorded to be placed on the website for access by all districts.
- d. Through the TN-TAN network, the Intensive Behavior Supports team supported 41 school districts and 108 educators through training, coaching, or consulting to address students with complex behavioral needs. There was over 515 hours of intense technical assistance delivered by TRIAD consultants.
- e. Through the TN-TAN network, the Intensive Behavior Supports team developed and lead 11 online modules and two process guides, as well as held four in-person trainings for paraprofessionals.
- f. Guided reviews were conducted for districts that identified as having significant disproportionality in the area of discipline. Technical assistance was provided regarding the manifestation determination review process as well

as alternative solutions to exclusionary behavioral consequences.

- g. The restraint and isolation review process was revised from annual to monthly reviews. The department collaborated with TRIAD through TN-TAN Complex Behavior contract to provide support to districts that reported high numbers of restraint and isolation. Additionally, districts were offered training for restraint and isolation reporting practices.
- h. Three trainings were conducted with district special education directors on SEBSA and restraint and isolation reporting requirements.
- i. Six district-specific trainings were conducted on SEBSA and restraint and isolation reporting requirements.
- j. Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP) templates were developed to align with SBE.

Part Two

The tables below provide 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.

Total by Grade	
Grade	Student Count
P3 – (Preschool)	3,378
P4 – (Preschool)	5,611
K	8,197
1	9,400
2	10,076
3	10,295
4	10,130
5	9,665
6	9,043
7	8,818
8	8,919
9	8,983
10	8,264
11	8,009
12	8,391
TOTAL	127,179

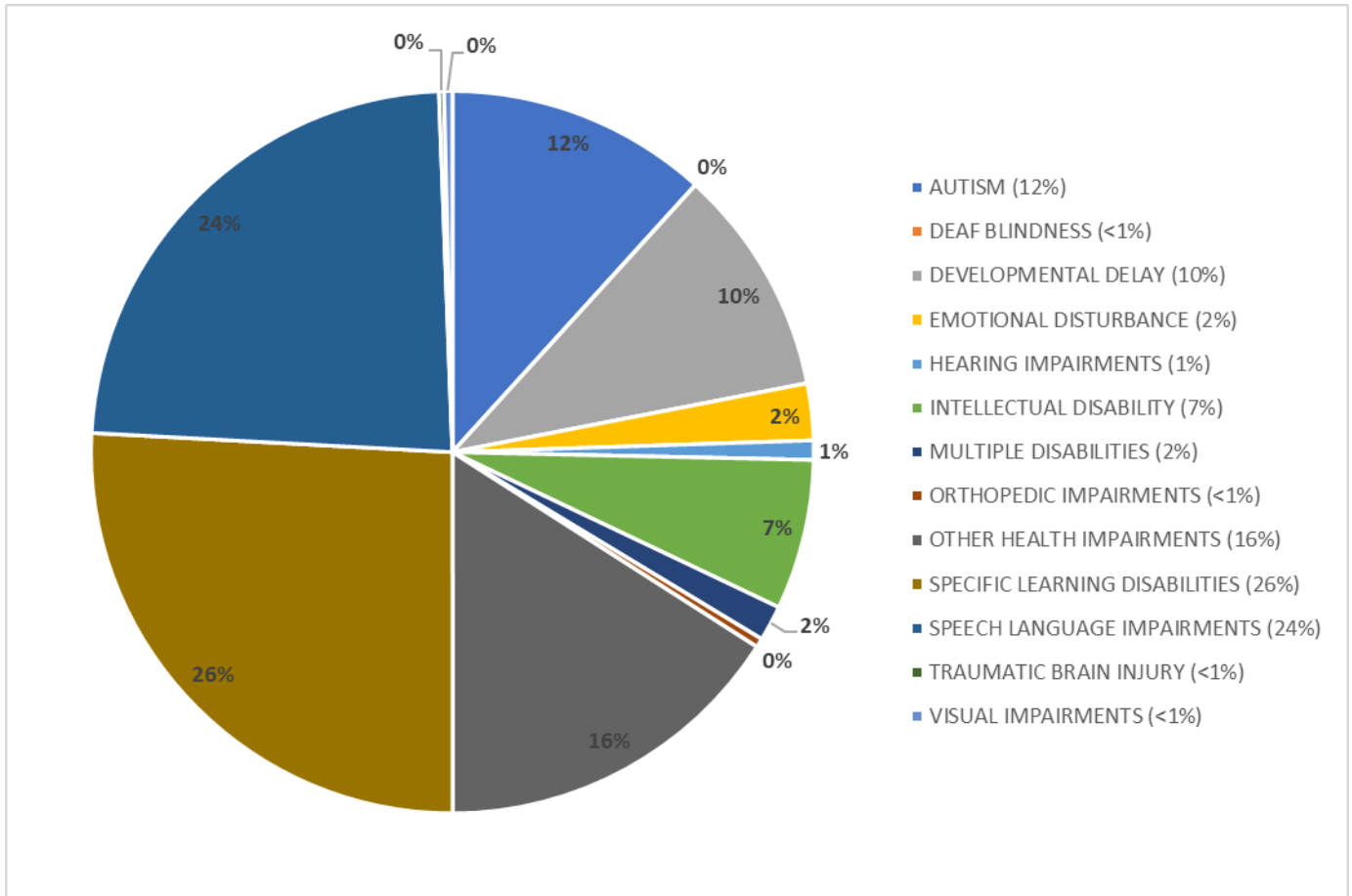
Total by Gender	
Gender	Student Count
Female	42,624
Male	84,555
TOTAL	127,179

Total by Early Childhood Environment	
Early Childhood Environment	Student Count
Children attending regular early childhood program 10+ hours and receiving majority of special education services in regular early childhood program	3,302
Children attending regular early childhood program 10+ hours and receiving majority of special education services in other location	1,449
Children attending regular childhood program <10 hours and receiving majority of special education services in regular early childhood program	178
Children attending regular early childhood program <10 hours and receiving majority of special education services in other location	127
Children attending a special education program (not regular early childhood program), and attending a separate special education class	2,882
Children attending a special education program (not regular early childhood program), and attending a separate school	32
Children attending a special education program (not regular early childhood program), and attending a residential facility	0
Children attending neither a special education program nor special education program, and getting special education services at home	57
Children attending neither a special education program nor regular education program, and getting special education services at service provider location or other location	933
TOTAL STUDENTS	8,960

Total by K-12 Environment	
K-12 Environment	Student Count
Inside a regular classroom 80% or more each school day	86,185
Inside a regular classroom 40% - 79% of each school day	15,513
Inside a regular classroom less than 40% of each school day	13,341
Attending a separate school	677
Attending a residential facility	198
Homebound or in a hospital	881
Correctional facilities	52
Parentally placed in private school	1372
TOTAL	118,219

Total by Disability	
Disability Category	Student Count
Autism	14,924
Deaf-Blindness	16
Developmental Delay	12,962
Emotional Disturbance	3,227
Hearing Impairments	1,102
Intellectual Disability	8,551
Multiple Disabilities	2,021
Orthopedic Impairments	517
Other Health Impairments	20,256
Specific Learning Disabilities	32,889
Speech or Language Impairments	29,954
Traumatic Brain Injury	287
Visual Impairments	473
TOTAL	127,179

Percentage by Disability



Part Three

Through engagement and advisement from the council, the department is better informed and responsive to the areas of need related to special education services for students with disabilities. The council meetings are a vital mechanism for seeking feedback and guidance from statewide constituents for the benefit of Tennessee students.

All agendas for the fiscal year 2022 Council meetings can be found on the department's [website](#).

Meetings were convened on:

- July 20, 2021
- October 28, 2021
- January 19, 2022
- May 2, 2022

The department continues to value the collective voice of the council to guide our work and improve outcomes for students with disabilities through newly prioritized goals in the next year.