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I am speaking as the facilitator of the NEOEA Special Education Work Group and as the OADDP website editor.

I want to thank the NEOEA Board of Directors and the NEOEA Representative Assembly for their overwhelming support for this new business item.

This new business item is the result of discussions among special educators in local school districts and DDs that began in 2016 when the OADDP distributed a special education survey at the spring 2016 OEA RA.

Subsequently, NEOEA formed a Special Education Work Group in March 2017 to consider ways to address the concerns of these special educators and work within OEA to effect change. The group held three meetings and now feels that it is time for OEA to take serious steps to address the needs of OEA members involved in or supporting education programs for students with special needs.

The bottom line is that many OEA members in all settings, especially the roughly 15% that identify as working in special education, report they face critical challenges in obtaining and providing additional supports and accommodations for the success of students with special needs.

Teaching and non-teaching special educators and support staff have completed surveys and related personal experiences that all point to two major areas of immediate need: professional development and sample contract language.

The overwhelming concern is for more professional development for teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff; especially in the areas of appropriate IEPs and classroom/behavior management.

Critically important are the issues of staffing, case load, and planning time. Members state that they are stretched too thinly to adequately meet the needs of their students. Contract language needs to be looked at.

Furthermore, the OEA Resolutions and Legislative Policies should be reviewed to assure that they adequately address the needs of members involved with special education.

An OEA Special Education Work Group would be able to quickly assess needs and develop recommendations from a statewide perspective. Perhaps some of the recommendations could result in options for the OEA Summer Academy. Other recommendations could be passed to the appropriate OEA committee for further action.

At its March statewide conference, the OADDP will expand its focus to advocate for the needs of K-12 Special Educators and consider a name change to “Ohio Association of Special Needs Professionals.” For information on the Spring Conference visit OADDP.org.

Now that most students with DD are served by their local K-12 schools, many K-12 special education members are experiencing the same challenges of obtaining adequate and appropriate supports that DD staff has faced for the past thirty-five years. It is time for OEA to reconsider and address the needs of special educators.

Please support the new business item to establish an OEA Special Education Work Group.

Currently, OADDP is the only OEA affiliate or associate organization involved in special education. For the past thirty-four years, OADDP was primarily concerned with OEA members in County Board of DD programs. Few K-12 special educators have been involved, mostly because they identify more strongly as K-12 special education than with the term developmental disabilities. The OADDP leadership is committed to expanding the scope to also focus on the needs of K-12 special educators. OADDP leadership invites K-12 special educators to work with them to develop an inclusive organization supporting all special needs professionals. Please visit the Special Education Work Group page on OADDP.ORG to review our work and sign up for the email list.