

Office of the Statewide Director of the Delaware Autism Program Change of Administrative Home Information Sheet

This information is offered by Autism Delaware to keep our community informed of an emerging issue of importance. The information below represents our best knowledge of the situation at this time. Autism Delaware's position is to advocate for a management system that ensures that all districts have access to resources to meet the needs for the growing population of students with ASD.

Many of you may have heard or seen reports of changes to the administrative home of the Office of the Statewide Director of the Delaware Autism Program. Autism Delaware would like to provide some background and facts related to this issue. We wish to provide background and facts to supplement what you may read on blogs or in the news. Please pay close attention to Item #2. The Office of the Statewide Director of the Delaware Autism Program (which is in question) does not manage school personnel or district programs. To the best of our knowledge, there is no discussion of the Department of Education "taking over" schools or personnel related to school/district programs.

1. For more than 30 years, Christina School District served as the administrative home for the Office of the Statewide Director of the Delaware Autism Program.
2. The Office of the Statewide Director does not manage schools or district programs. That is the responsibility of the district where the schools/programs reside.
3. Until 2018, The Office of the Statewide Director provided monitoring and oversight to only the 6 Delaware Autism Program districts (Christina, Caesar Rodney, Cape Henlopen, Brandywine, Capital, Seaford)
4. The Statewide Director (formerly Vince Winterling) announced his desire to retire more than 2 ½ years ago.
5. Christina School District had the position posted for more than 2 ½ years. Autism Delaware has a representative on the search committee. In that time, the search committee reviewed 3 resumes and interviewed 1 unsuccessful candidate.
6. In June 2018, House Bill 292 expanded the purview of the Office of the Statewide Director to require the Office of the Statewide Director to provide oversight to all districts and authorized new training personnel to the Office of the Statewide Director.
7. To date, Christina School District has not advertised for the new training personnel positions.
8. In August 2018, Dr. Winterling officially retired from the position of Statewide Director of the Delaware Autism Program.
9. In the fall of 2018, Autism Delaware reached out to Christina School District Superintendent Richard Gregg to ask for a meeting to discuss Christina School District plan to implement the Statewide Program and received no response.
10. Dr. Winterling expressed his willingness to stay on a limited contract to work on some items required in Title 14 Administrative code. His contract was signed in November 2018.
11. There are other pieces of Title 14 Administrative Code related to the Delaware Autism Program which the Department of Education is responsible to ensure, that are not part of the Christina School District/Winterling contract.
12. Autism Delaware is not privy to the details of the contract between Christina School District and Dr. Winterling.
13. For more than 2 years, the Special Education Strategic Planning Advisory Committee has been working to identify ways to restructure all of the Statewide Programs (Autism, Visually Impaired, Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Deaf-Blind) to include "a statewide network" and restructuring under a

“state agency or LEA”. This committee is chaired by Michelle Marinucci, Director of Pupil Personnel Services at Christina School District and Bill Doolittle, parent advocate.

14. Autism Delaware has 2 representatives on the Special Education Strategic Planning Advisory Committee and has been in support of restructuring the Office of the Statewide Director to provide improved services and access to training and monitoring of all districts serving students with autism.
15. It is our understanding that representatives from Christina School District met with the Department of Education to express concerns about their ability to hire for positions related to the Office of the Statewide Director (Director and training specialists).
16. Title 14 stipulates that “The Department, with the approval of the State Board of Education, shall designate a school district or other entity to administer the statewide program (“program”) for students with an educational classification of ASD. If no district or other entity is willing to administer the statewide program, the Department must act in that role.”
17. In order to ensure compliance with Title 14 code, the Delaware Department of Education informed Christina School District in January 2019 that staff related to the Office of the Statewide Director would report to the Department of Education.
18. It is our understanding that the Christina School District Board of Education was unaware of the meeting between Christina School District representatives and the Department of Education. Further, they were unaware of changes to the administrative home of the Office of the Statewide Director of the Delaware Autism Program.
19. Autism Delaware was unaware of meetings between Christina representatives and the Department of Education and changes to the administrative home of the Office of the Statewide Director until the issue surfaced in January 2019.
20. It is our understanding that a current proposal is for Dr. Winterling to remain contracted with Christina School District as Director and for training personnel to report to the Department of Education. Autism Delaware is not in favor of a proposal that would split personnel between two entities.

Funding Issue

21. Governor Carney’s proposed 2020 budget did not include funding for the expanded training personnel associated with the Office of the Statewide Director of the Delaware Autism Program (authorized in HB 292).
22. HB 292 sponsor, Representative Earl Jaques, and Autism Delaware will be addressing this oversight with the Governor.