Sean Parnell, Governor
State of Alaska

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

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US Dept of Education
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Ms McPherson,

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (Council) is the Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) as required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Council meets three times a year around the state. These face to face meetings last for three days. The Council delegates the day to day SEAP responsibilities to the Education Committee (EC) to work on priority issues and activities related to education of children with disabilities in Alaska. The EC meets monthly by teleconference and one face to face meeting each year. EC members are former special education students, parents of children with disabilities, superintendents, special education directors, related service providers, State special education staff, university chair, and others involved in providing education to students with disabilities in Alaska.

For additional information on the Council and the Education Committee, please visit our website at: http://health.hss.state.ak.us/gcdse/. Below is a list of the required SEAP membership and the names of the individuals who fulfill those positions:

1) **Parent of child with disability (ages 0-26)**-Julie Broyles (Council/EC), Jeanne Gerhardt-Cyrus (EC), Hettie Hume (EC), Kris Johnston (Council/EC), Deborah Kitelinger (Council/EC), Stacey Messerschmidt (Council), Christie Reinhardt (EC), Chris Saddler (Council/EC), Sarah Souders (Council/EC), Donna Swihart (Council)
2) **Individuals with disability**-Marlene Attla (Council/EC), Milton Cheemuk (Council), Taylor Gregg (Council/EC), Ric Nelson (Council/EC), Travis Noah (Council), Lucy Odden (Council), Arthur Walters (Council)
3) **Teachers**-Julie Broyles (Council/EC), Janean Butler (EC), Nancy Nagarkar (EC)
4) **Higher Education Reps who prepare sped teachers and related services**-Dean Konopasek (EC)
5) **State and Local Education officials (including McKinney-Vento rep)**- Art Arnold (Council/EC), Geri Benshoof (State Board of Education and Early Development liaison/EC), Eric Gebhart (Council/EC), Kay Holmes (EC), John Owens (Council/EC)
6) **Administrators of programs for children with disabilities**-Jerry Fuller (Council)

7) **Other state agency reps**- Jerry Fuller (Council)
8) **Private/Charter School reps**-Debbie Kitelinger (Statewide correspondence school–Council/EC)
9) **Transition rep** (voc, community, business)-David Kvasagar (EC), Russ Cusack (Council)
10) **State child welfare agency rep-**Jerry Fuller (Council)
11) **DJJ/Corrections rep-**Karen Jenkins-DOC (EC), Barbara Murray-DJJ (EC)

The Council works closely with Alaska's Department of Education and Early Development (EED) to advise them on the unmet educational needs of Alaskan children with disabilities. The Council gathers information on unmet needs through the personal experiences of our Council and EC members, correspondence sent to the Council, public testimony at Council meetings, attendance at various conferences and stakeholder meetings as well as through reviews of EED's Annual Performance Report and monitoring data. The Council provides advice to EED in various formats including input at EED stakeholder meetings which are held several times a year, presentations to Alaska's State Board of Education and Early Development, and in written form to Art Arnold. The Council meets as needed with the State Director of Special Education and the Commissioner of Education to discuss issues regarding the education of students with disabilities. The State Board of Education and Early Development (Board) provides a Board liaison to the Council. She attends Council and EC meetings on a regular basis and often brings special education issues before the Board. The Council also participates on the planning committee of the Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference. This allows the Council to create training opportunities to address unmet needs of students with disabilities at this conference. The Council is also asked to provide training suggestions for the Special Education Directors conference.

The Council regularly provides public comment on rules and regulations proposed by the State regarding the education of children with disabilities. Council staff attends the quarterly State Board of Education and Early Development (Board) meetings. The Education Committee (EC) reviews all changes to education regulations to ensure they consider students with disabilities. The Council then provides written comments to the Board and Council staff provides oral comment at the Board meetings. Council staff is often requested to provide input during Board meetings to assist members in understanding issues related to the education of students with disabilities. The Board provides a liaison to the Council. She attends Council and EC meetings on a regular basis and often brings special education issues before the Board. For example, at our May Council meeting, there was a discussion regarding removal of the term "mental retardation" in the education regulations. The Board liaison took this request to the Board at their next meeting and regulations were put out for public comment. The Council organized interested individuals to provide written and oral comment to the Board. The

Council also provided written and oral comment at the Board meeting. At the September Board meeting, the Board voted to replace "mental retardation" with "cognitive impairment".

The Council advises EED in developing evaluation and reporting on data to the Department of Education in several different ways. The Education Committee (EC) reviews indicators in depth at each committee meeting. The EC reviews the data and improvement activities. The Council provides suggestions to EED on an annual basis regarding state improvement activities that could improve data for each indicator. For example, at the EC's April meeting, the contractor for the parent survey presented to the EC. The EC members were able to provide several suggestions to improve the next year's survey including suggestions on question wording and how they thought EED could partner with Stone Soup Group (Alaska's Parent Training and Information Center) to improve the return on parent surveys.

The Council regularly advises EED in developing and implementing policies and procedures relating to the coordination and provision of services for children with disabilities. The Council gathers information on policies and procedures that need to be changed through the personal experiences of our Council and EC members, correspondence sent to the Council, public testimony at Council meetings, attendance at various conferences and stakeholder meetings as well as through reviews of EED's Annual Performance Report and monitoring data. The Council provides advice to EED in various ways including input at EED stakeholder meetings which are held several times a year, presentations to Alaska's State Board of Education and Early Development, and in written form to Art Arnold. The Council meets as needed with the State Director of Special Education and the Commissioner of Education to discuss changes needed in policy and procedures to improve the education of students with disabilities.

Each year the Council reviews the Annual Performance Report on the status of Alaska's special education programs operated by EED. As stated above the Education Committee (EC) does an in depth review of each APR indicator during EC meetings. They ask EED staff about the data in each indicator, do additional research on indicator items and then provide EED with suggestions for state improvement activities. The EC also gathers a subcommittee to review the APR in January before it is sent into OSEP. The Council and Education Committee members are always included in EED stakeholder meetings and are able to provide suggestions at these meetings regarding state improvement activities. The Council has attended stakeholder meetings on such issues as disproportionality, a review of state improvement activities, CIMP, etc.

GENERAL SUPERVISION

GS1: Identification of Noncompliance

- **Considering the various parts of the State's general supervision (monitoring) system (e.g.; dispute resolution, self assessments, on-site visits, etc.), does the State utilize these components timely and effectively in identifying noncompliance in the State?**
- **If not, how does the State identify noncompliance at the local level?**
- **What are the strengths and challenges of the State's system in identifying noncompliance?**
- **What systems are in place to address the challenges/barriers?**

Alaska's Department of Education and Early Development (EED) mainly uses the online data system (OASIS), the supplemental workbook and onsite monitoring to identify noncompliance at the local level. EED staff are assigned to follow up with districts on noncompliance of LEAs. The strength of this system is the online data system. EED staff are able to regularly review data and provide technical assistance to local districts to ensure quality and timeliness of services to students. EED staff also provide onsite monitoring on a rotating basis. One challenge in Alaska's system is that there are not enough EED staff to provide onsite monitoring on an annual basis to all districts. Currently the EED staff complete onsite monitoring on a rotating basis so every school district is monitored once every five years with large school districts monitored annually. Onsite monitoring is needed more often as district staff in remote schools have a high turnover rate. Some districts have a complete staff turnover every two years. It is possible for school staff to work in a district and leave before EED monitors the district. EED staff provide specific trainings at conferences every year to new district special education directors to try to solve this problem. The EED is working with various partners in the state to improve the retention of special educators especially in rural Alaska. For example, EED uses their state personnel development grant to fund a mentoring program for teachers new to Alaska.

GS2: Correction of Noncompliance

- **What systems are in place to ensure timely correction of identified noncompliance?**
- **Does the State implement technical assistance, training, enforcement sanctions, or other specific actions to ensure correction of noncompliance?**
- **What procedures and/or processes does the State have in place to ensure correction of noncompliance?**
- **What are the strengths and challenges of the State's system in ensuring correction of noncompliance?**
- **What systems are in place to address the challenges/barriers?**

The EED staff use online data, mandatory technical assistance meetings, correction plans and targeted trainings at state conferences to ensure timely correction of identified noncompliance. The EED staff that monitor districts are responsible to follow up on any issues of noncompliance at the LEA. EED staff also provide in-person technical assistance to LEA staff when they are not in compliance with the indicators. For example, LEAs that meet the State defined risk ration for disproportionality are required to attend an in-person training and come up with a plan for correction.

GS3: Dispute Resolution

- **Does the State have practices and procedures in place that are reasonably designed to ensure the implementation of dispute resolution procedures (complaints, due process hearings, and mediation) in the State?**
- **If no, how does the State handle complaints, etc.?**
- **What are the strengths and challenges of the State's dispute resolution system?**
- **What systems are in place to address the challenges/barriers?**

Alaska has practices and procedures in place to resolve dispute resolution. Alaska's mediation system is very effective but not well utilized. The complaint investigators are generally complete their investigations in a timely manner. The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education has received comments from several sources that due process hearings take as long as one to three years to complete. The Council feels this is too long for the child to be waiting for a dispute to be resolved. The Council would like to see the mediation system be used more frequently. The Council has received concerns that many complaint investigators are former special education directors and as such, tend to be biased towards districts. The Council would like to see recruitment of non special education individuals as complaint investigators. Another complaint the Council has received is that the due process hearing officers do not receive enough training, especially for new hearing officers. The Council would like to see a three day annual training for hearing officers and a longer training for new hearing officers.

GS4: Educational Results/Improved Outcomes

- **What is the State doing to ensure improved outcomes for students with disabilities (e.g.; preschool and post school outcomes)?**
- **Are these programs and strategies helping to improve outcomes in the State?**
- **What are the challenges in ensuring improved outcomes in the State? How are they being addressed?**

The EED is currently collecting data on early childhood outcomes for preschool children and post school outcomes for students in secondary. Alaska has two programs sponsored by the EED to improve outcomes for transition to preschool (Alaska Transition Training Initiative) and secondary transition (Alaska Transition Outcome Project). One challenge for improved outcomes is the continual staff turnover at the local level. This requires constant training for new staff. The EED is currently working on an online training program for Early Childhood Outcomes which should help with this issue. The EED

provides an annual conference for special education directors and sponsors the Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference for special education staff.

GS5: Implementation of Grant Assurances
Determinations – What procedures does the State have in place for making local determinations and implementing enforcement?
EED makes local determinations based on the federal indicators using the online OASIS data system, the supplemental workbook and onsite monitoring visits. EED provides follow up with districts that have not met indicators.

How does the State inform the public of its determination as determined by the Secretary of Education as well as the State's determination of local school districts?
EED provides information on local districts through online district profiles. One challenge with this is that it is difficult to find these profiles on the website unless you know where to look. These profiles provide information about districts but do not provide information on the actual determination. The Council has access to district determinations if we request them.

Significant Disproportionality – What are the State's procedures for collecting, examining and reporting data regarding significant disproportionality?
In regards to disproportionality, Alaska provides challenges regarding statistics. We often have schools and districts with low numbers making it difficult to get a good statistical data. We also have many districts/schools in which Alaska native children are the majority with one or two Caucasian children. The Council feels it is important to continue to review the disproportionality statistics but they should always be reviewed understanding the realities of the local community.

Parentally Placed Private School – Do children with disabilities placed by their parents in private schools receive equitable services compared with children with disabilities in public schools?
Alaska has very few truly private schools compared to other states. Some of these private schools provide education exclusively to students with disabilities. There are a few religious schools which often do not accept students with disabilities. Some school districts provide special education and related services to children with disabilities in private preschools. There Council has no information or data on equitable services in private schools.

Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS) – How does the State ensure students are properly receiving CEIS at the local level? How does the State track students who received early intervening services and subsequently received special education and related services under Part B of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) during the preceding 2-year period?

Currently there are no districts who are required to provide CEIS services in Alaska. EED has CEIS policies and procedures in place incase districts request or are required to use CEIS funding.

DATA

DS1: Data Collection

- **What mechanisms does the State have in place to ensure that the data collected by its data system is valid, reliable, timely, and accurate?**
- **What are the strengths and challenges of the State's system in collecting valid and reliable data?**
- **What steps has the State implemented to improve data collection?**

The EED uses OASIS, the supplemental workbook and onsite monitoring to collect data. EED sets up timelines for data collection and contacts local districts if they fail to turn in data, this continues until data is submitted. EED reviews the data and makes year to year comparisons as well as statewide comparisons. EED staff contact local districts when there are anomalies in the data or questionable trends. EED staff also checks across monitoring systems to verify data including onsite monitoring, OASIS online data system and sped supplemental data. The EED staff make onsite visits to monitor local districts on a rotational basis. One challenge for Alaska's EED is the small number of staff to validate the online data and complete onsite visits. Also the data can often be misleading due to the small numbers or the large numbers of minority children in some districts and schools.

DS2: Data Verification

- **What systems does the State have in place to ensure the data collected reflect actual practices in the State**?

EED reviews the data and makes year to year comparisons as well as statewide comparisons. EED calls local districts when there are anomalies in the data or questionable trends. EED also checks across monitoring systems to verify data including onsite monitoring, OASIS online data system and sped supplemental data.

DS3: Data Integration

- **How does the State use and integrate its data across all systems to make informed decisions and to improve outcomes for children with disabilities?**
- **How might the State improve this process? What are the barriers?**

The EED staff use online data, mandatory technical assistance meetings, correction plans and targeted trainings at state conferences to ensure timely correction of identified noncompliance. The EED staff that monitor districts are responsible to follow up on any issues of noncompliance at the LEA. EED staff also provide in person technical assistance to LEA staff when they are not in compliance with the indicators. For example, LEAs who have issues with disproportionality are required to attend an in person training and come up with a plan for correction.

FISCAL MANAGEMENT

FS1: Obligation and Liquidation

- **Does the State have mechanisms in place to ensure IDEA funds are obligated and liquidated in a timely manner?**

Each local district provides a budget to EED for approval. Then EED tracks each grant through a separate accounting system. Local districts have to get approval for any changes to the approved budget. Districts must request reimbursement on a quarterly basis and provide backup documentation for all reimbursement. EED reviews all funds to ensure they are liquidated within appropriate time frame.

FS2: Distribution

- **What is your role, if any, in advising the State's procedures and practices to ensure appropriate distribution of IDEA funds within the State?**

The EC participates in various stakeholder groups to work on improvements in the distribution of IDEA funding. The EC is also involved in providing suggestions for the Special Education Handbook. The Council advocates with our congressional delegation to increase IDEA funding.

FS3: Use of Funds

- **Does the State have procedures and practices in place to ensure appropriate management and use of IDEA funds?**
- **What are the strengths and challenges of the State's system in managing its use of IDEA funds?**
- **What steps has the State implemented to improve the use of IDEA funds?**

EED has procedures and practices to ensure each local district provides a budget to EED for approval. Then EED tracks each grant through a separate accounting system. Local districts have to get approval for any changes to the approved budget. Districts must request reimbursement on a quarterly basis and provide backup documentation for all reimbursement. EED reviews all funds to ensure they are liquidated within appropriate time frame.

Kris Johnston, who was the recent Chair of the Education Committee for the Council, and Teresa Holt will be available during your monitoring visit to answer any questions you might have regarding this information.

Respectfully,

Donna Swihart

Donna Swihart
Council Chair

Creating Change That Improves the Lives of People with Disabilities