



## *National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc.*

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January 11, 2007

Sarah Kuiken  
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Potomac Center Plaza  
Room 4102  
Washington, DC 20202-2641

Dear Ms. Kuiken:

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) appreciates this opportunity to submit comments on the IDEA Part D National Activities Comprehensive Plan, which was posted in the Federal Register on November 27, 2006. NASDSE is the national nonprofit organization that represents the state directors of special education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense, the Bureau of Indian Education, the territories and the Freely Associated States.

NASDSE appreciates the attention that OSERS and OSEP have given to the development of this plan. Overall, NASDSE is pleased with the focus and direction of the national plan. We are particularly pleased to see the references to Response to Intervention (RtI) in several places, as this is a critical effort that has the potential to ensure that all students get the educational supports and services that they need as soon as possible.

In general, we believe that the plan needs to have a greater emphasis on providing technical assistance for implementation of the many solid approaches that are outlined in this plan. Our comments point out some specific areas where we believe more technical assistance is needed.

In addition, NASDSE believes that the approach developed by NASDSE's IDEA Partnership with respect to Communities of Practice, (e.g., the Partnership's Community of Practice on Transition) shows significant promise in working to improve outcomes. NASDSE recommends that OSEP continue to invest in the Communities of Practice strategy and believes that his approach can and should be reflected throughout this plan.

Our specific comments follow.

### ***Outcome 1: To the Maximum Extent Appropriate, Children With Disabilities Will Receive High Quality Educational and Early Intervention Services in Natural Settings With Typically Developing Peers***

- *Describe characteristics of successful interventions to optimize children's access to the general education curriculum or appropriate early childhood activities.*

NASDSE recommends that language be added that specifically addresses the research-to-practice component of this work. Describing the characteristics of successful interventions without disseminating them and providing technical assistance for implementation of them will not produce the desired results. We recommend that the statement be re-worded to state: "Models that include characteristics of successful interventions to optimize children's access to the general education curriculum or appropriate early childhood activities will be broadly disseminated and technical assistance to

implement them will be provided through OSEP’s technical assistance network including the regional resource center network.”

- *Assess the impact of participation in the general education curriculum on student academic performance and social and behavioral interactions.*

NASDSE concurs with the importance of this activity but suggests that it be followed up with action steps. In addition to “assessing the impact of participation,” this statement should include language on how OSEP will utilize the data collected for this purpose. NASDSE recommends that the statement be written as follows: “Assess the impact of participation in the general education curriculum on student academic performance and social and behavioral interactions and develop a technical assistance strategy that will improve outcomes.”

- *Align student data collection, analysis and reporting systems to be consistent with State accountability systems.*

NASDSE strongly concurs with need to align data collection systems. However, this statement focuses only on the need to align classroom data with data collected for LEA and SEA data collection requirements. It does not address the need to align data collection across programs, particularly IDEA and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NASDSE strongly recommends that a new bullet point and new language be added to this section that acknowledges the need to align data collection, analysis, and reporting systems to be consistent across IDEA and the ESEA.

- *Identify uses of technology to enhance and monitor student participation in the general education curriculum or appropriate early childhood practices.*

NASDSE concurs with the importance of this statement.

## **Outcome 2: Children With Disabilities Will Be Appropriately Identified and Serviced in a Timely Manner**

- *Disseminate evidence-based models of early identification and early intervening programs, including programs based on “Response to Intervention” (RtI).*

NASDSE applauds OSERS for including work on RtI in its master plan.

- *Enhance the ability of regular education, special education, and early childhood programs to collect, analyze and report progress data for continuous, data-based decision-making.*

We note the reference in this subsection to the need for “data collection and reporting systems across agencies (emphasis added) need to be compatible and comprehensible to both users and receivers of the information.” We strongly urge OSERS to interpret this section to include agencies at the state and local levels as well as departments within the U.S. Department of Education.

## **Outcome 3: Children with Disabilities Will Demonstrate Improved Literacy, Including Early Language, Communication and Numeracy Skills**

- *Encourage implementation of RTI as an instructional practice in regular education environments.*

NASDSE commends OSERS for focusing on strategies to implement RTI in regular education environments. NASDSE believes that widespread use of RTI as an instructional practice in general education settings has tremendous potential to improve outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities. NASDSE encourages OSERS to add language to this section that will take “encouragement” to “implementation” by “providing technical assistance that encourages implementation of RTI.” This technical assistance can be provided through established (or new) technical assistance providers that include the regional resource centers. The RRCs have already demonstrated their willingness and ability to provide such technical assistance as was demonstrated by a recent conference arranged by SERRC that included several states as well as several of the ESEA-

funded comprehensive centers. NASDSE also recommends that language be added to this section that encourages the involvement of the comprehensive centers.

#### **Outcome 4: Children With Disabilities Will Demonstrate Improved Social and Behavioral Skills**

- *Develop positive measures to assess social and emotional growth and development.*

NASDSE agrees that with the recent focus on improved outcomes for students with disabilities that OSERS should also focus on positive measures to assess social and emotional growth. Increased use of positive behavior supports shows great promise in helping to improve behavioral health of students with disabilities. NASDSE encourages OSERS to develop positive measures and recommends that language be added to this section to provide for technical assistance to increase the use of strategies that will generate the positive measures described in this section. Further NASDSE strongly urges that the development of positive measures replace the current emphasis on behavioral difficulties and not layer new measures on top of existing ones. Adding additional measures for states and local school districts will only serve to dilute the positive influence that these strategies can convey.

#### **Outcome 5: Students with Disabilities Will Complete High School Prepared for Independent Living and Postsecondary Education and/or Competitive Employment**

- *Develop a broad range of performance measures to assess student transition outcomes.*

NASDSE is seriously concerned that OSERS is contemplating the development of additional performance measures at this time. With the passage and implementation of IDEA 2004, states have recently developed new state performance plans (SPPs) and will submit their first annual performance reports (APRs) that will reflect their progress on their SPPs. The indicators for the SPPs/APRs have been changed several times over the course of their introduction. States are just beginning to gather data for these reports. The SPPs are extremely comprehensive in terms of the data that the states are collecting and the indicators already include reporting on graduation rates and post-school outcomes. NASDSE strongly believes that it would be a disservice to the use of the SPP as a tool for improvement to consider adding additional performance measures before the states and OSEP have had some time to review the effectiveness of the current performance measures. NASDSE strongly urges that rather than focusing on a new range of performance measures, OSERS focus on strategies to help states implement and improve upon the related indicators in the SPP. NASDSE's recommendation is that this section be rewritten as follows: "Develop strategies to improve the collection of data under the SPP that are used to assess transition outcomes for students with disabilities.

- *Promote programs that include both academic achievement skills attainment...and, as needed, the skills necessary to participate in employment and community living.*

NASDSE applauds the Department's recognition of the importance of integrating employment and community living skills and the difficulty in promoting these skills in students with the current emphasis on academic outcomes. By adding this component to the Part D plan, NASDSE hopes that this will enable the Department to promote strategies that will help states and local school districts incorporate these activities into their overall programs.

- *Increase collaboration among stakeholder agencies for long-term postsecondary success, including continuing education, employment, independent living and community participation.*

NASDSE applauds the Department's commitment and emphasis on working with other agencies to ensure successful post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. NASDSE urges the Department to model successful collaborative initiatives that can be copied at the state and local levels.

- *Promote early student and family involvement in transition planning with an emphasis on self-determination.*

NASDSE agrees that student and family involvement in transition planning must begin early. However, this statement does not define what is meant by early. As a result, it will be subject to much interpretation at all levels. It is not too early for initial conversations about transition to begin at the middle-school level. Therefore, NASDSE recommends that the explanation that accompanies this statement include additional language that clarifies specifically what is meant by “early” (e.g., including initial conversations in middle school, where appropriate).

#### **Outcome 6: All Service Providers Including Special Education Teachers, Paraprofessionals, Related Service Personnel and Early Intervention Personnel Will Be Qualified, and Possess the Knowledge and Skills to Implement Effective, Research-Based Practices and Interventions**

NASDSE agrees with the importance of this emphasis. However, we are disappointed that the statement only addresses providers of special education services and supports. With the emphasis on placing students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (e.g., a general education classroom), it is incumbent that all teachers and instructional aides be prepared to work with all students, including students with disabilities. This is one critical area where OSEP must work with other offices within the U.S. Department of Education to ensure that all personnel have the knowledge and skills to work with all students. OSEP took a very important first step when it co-funded three comprehensive centers with the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. This is an excellent model that can and should be used to ensure that pre-service and in-service activities are directed toward this important outcome. Not only should the Department model this type of collaborative initiative, it should provide technical assistance funds to encourage collaborative efforts at the state and local levels. For example, the RRCs, funded by OSEP, could be provided with additional funds to work collaboratively with the comprehensive centers, funded by OESE, to develop collaborative in-service programs at the state level, which states and local education agencies can then use as a model for their own professional development activities.

- *Identify the characteristics of quality pre-service programs that prepare special and regular education teachers and early childhood providers to best serve students with disabilities.*

NASDSE concurs with this statement, but we believe that Part D programs must go beyond simply identifying quality characteristics to disseminating this information in useful formats. See our comments above.

#### **Outcome 7: Family Capacity Will Be Enhanced**

- *Enhancing the capacity of underserved parents and families to become decision-makers in their child's current and future education, home and community environments.*

NASDSE recognizes the importance of this statement. However, we believe that the phrase “underserved parents” is vague and is not explained in the comments under this section. NASDSE recommends that language be added to this section to explicitly define the target audience for this work.

NASDSE thanks you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed priorities for Part D. Please feel free to contact either Nancy Reder, NASDSE's deputy executive director at [nancy.reder@nasdse.org](mailto:nancy.reder@nasdse.org); (703-519-3800, ext. 334) or myself at [bill.east@nasdse.org](mailto:bill.east@nasdse.org) (703-519-3800, ext. 332) should you have any questions regarding our comments.

Sincerely,



Bill East, Ed.D.  
Executive Director